



It's not surprising that as a church named after St. James, we have several images of St. James around our building, as well as our friend, the statue here. There are two stained glass images of St. James in the church. I'm about to show you pictures of them. But as I do, I want you to look at them closely and see something that they have in common, that all three images of St. James have. And I'll give you a clue. It's something that St. James is holding.

So here's the first picture, and it's a picture taken in our sanctuary. And this is a window which is on the upper level, just on the lectern side of the church.



And this second window, which features St. James is in the chapel. And it was given in memory of the father of Ellen Browning Scripps, who actually gave the land on which St. James is built.

And do you notice what St. James is carrying in all three of the images? It's a stick. To be more precise, it's a walking stick. And that's because St. James is nearly always depicted as a pilgrim, someone who is on a spiritual journey. And for reasons which are too fanciful to explain, St. James is associated with Northern Spain and especially the city of Santiago de Compostela, where he's said to be buried. And for many centuries, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims have made their way to that city. And the pilgrimage ends at the wonderful cathedral there, and the route is called the Camino de Santiago, The Way of St. James.

Actually, you don't have to walk it. You can ride on a horse or you can ride on a bicycle, as I did in 2001. And I've got this certificate here to prove that I completed the journey. And I'll put that back down at the feet of St. James.

And actually there, isn't just one route to the city of Santiago de Compostela. There are many routes, many roads, which pilgrims go to get to that destination. It doesn't matter what route you take. However you make the route, if you complete the journey and you get to the cathedral, then you're given a shell, a cockle shell, which is very common off the coast of Northern Spain. And that shell shows that you have made the pilgrimage and completed the Camino, which is why you may have noticed that St. James often doesn't just have a staff and a gourd to carry water, but he's nearly always featured with a shell. And we have lots of shells around the building. For instance, we have lots of shells on our church doors, which you may not have noticed because when you come to church on a Sunday, they're obviously open. But this is what you'd see if they were closed.



And if we take a closer look at the shells, notice the lines on the cockle shell. And these were taken to represent the different routes, the different roads that led to the same place, that led to the cathedral. All the pilgrimage roads lead to the same place. So St. James is a Pilgrim Saint, and I want to keep that in mind as we turn to our passage from Romans, chapter eight, because I think there's a pilgrimage here too in these verses.

It begins with verse 18. St. Paul writes, "I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. This isn't a pilgrimage from one place to another. It's a pilgrimage from groaning to glory." I think it's in this context of our current pandemic, which drew me to the references. There are three references to groaning in these verses. Verse 22, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now."

Then he goes on the next verse, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly whilst we wait for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

There's a lot of groaning around at the moment, perhaps even more than normal. Can you imagine the groans that went up in the homes around our county when the governor announced that the schools wouldn't be opening at the beginning of the fall? Who was groaning loudest, do you think? The parents or the children? Probably a close-run thing.

The groans that St. Paul is talking about here are groans of anticipation. What Paul's depicting is a sense of anticipation and expectation. Verse 19, "The creation waits in eager expectation." And in verse 23, he talks of us waiting eagerly. And he uses a particularly unusual Greek word in that verse, which has at its root, the Greek word *cara*, which is a particular kind of word for head, in the sense of waiting with the head raised. The head raised and the eyes fixed on a point on the horizon from which something expected is to come.

It could be translated, "Standing on tiptoe," or, "Straining the neck to see." The Christian disposition is not about looking back or getting bogged down in the present. It's about looking forward. Looking forward to the glory which is to be revealed, and seeing life, understanding life from that perspective.

Paul writes something similar in second Corinthians. He says, "For in this tent, our body, we

groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling." Do you hear that sense of longing in Paul's voice? He's groaning with anticipation. His groaning comes as a result of living between the times, between the now and the not yet. He's encountered God, he's been filled with the Holy Spirit, but he knows that's simply a foretaste of the glory that is to come. St. Paul knew that he was journeying from groaning to glory.

And we're all called on that pilgrimage. But at this time, we're not journeying together as we normally are. We're not gathering on Sundays. We're out on the road, on our own, as it were. Remember that shell on the door? Remember it had different lines on it that represents different roads? Well, we're all walking on our own road at the moment. And some of us will be finding it easier than others but remember that great things can happen on the road. St. Paul himself first encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus when he wasn't expecting him. Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light.

And remember that story in the gospels after the resurrection? There were two disciples walking away from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus. And Jesus himself drew near and walked alongside them. Great things can happen on the road.

So let's look for where God might be drawing close to us as we journey on the road before us. God is still close by, even if we're not meeting on a Sunday. Are we paying attention where God is close to us on the road?

And let me close by suggesting that we think about what we need to take on our road trip to glory. What resources do we need on the road to keep us going? We're watching this service, which is a good idea, just to keep that habit of Sunday worship. And we can use this time to develop individual spiritual practices, to create a regular time for prayer, for meditation, reflection and Bible reading. And I'm learning in this time, the value of the prayer book, a resource that as a quite new Episcopalian, is new to me. But I've discovered in recent times the enormous riches that there are in

that book, which shapes our tradition as Episcopalians.

I'd like to suggest that we use this time of pandemic to dig deeper into the treasures in the prayer book. If you've got one at home, be sure to open it. If you haven't got one, order it. Look at it and find in there some prayers that will sustain us on this road to glory.

So let's be inspired by St. James today. Let's see ourselves as pilgrims walking on the road, remembering that it's a road that leads to glory.

Amen.