

The Feast of St. James Observed

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Preacher: Seminarian Matthew Stuart

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. The late Bishop Charles Gore once said, The Christian law is the reversal of the world's ideals.

To be great is to be the servant of all. To rule is to stoop. To save others is to consent to suffer. In our Gospel reading this morning, a mother comes to Jesus with her two sons, James and John, and kneels before him.

Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left in your kingdom. She is asking for the two highest places of honor beside the King.

Jesus replies, you do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

[1:07] The cup he speaks of is his suffering. The passion he is headed toward as they speak. Since this conversation takes place on the road to Jerusalem.

But they reply, we are able. They didn't understand the cup. As a man who has never seen war cannot know what he promises.

Our Lord himself prayed in the garden that this cup might pass from him. If he prayed this, so then the brothers could not have truly understood what they were promising.

Jesus does not rebuke them. He simply answers them, you will indeed drink my cup. The other ten heard what the brothers had asked and they were angry.

Their anger stemmed from envy, not righteousness. Because they wanted the same things the brothers wanted. Status, recognition, authority.

[2:16] So Jesus called them all to himself and taught them what greatness means in his kingdom. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

The rulers Jesus referred to were men like Herod. Whose greatness was measured by how many people obeyed him. It shall not be so among you, Jesus says.

The brothers got it wrong by chasing greatness the way that the world chases it. Climbing towards status and power. But many Christians get it wrong by going in the opposite direction.

Deciding that desire for greatness is itself the sin. And settling into a small faith that risks nothing and serves no one.

[3:28] Jesus corrects both. He doesn't condemn the desire. He turns it toward its true end. To sacrifice and to serve others.

He points to himself. The son of man did not come to be served. But to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many.

The king of heaven washed his disciples feet. And sacrificed his life for his enemies. He does what he commands.

True greatness in the kingdom of God belongs to those who serve. James asked for a seat of honor. The cup Christ gave him instead.

Made him the first apostle to die for his Lord. Our epistle reading this morning tells us how the promise was kept. Herod stretched out his hand to harass the church.

[4:38] And he killed James. He did it because it pleased the crowd. This is the idea of greatness our Lord warned the disciples about.

A king whose word could end a life. Years passed between James saying we are able and his martyrdom.

During those years he watched our Lord's crucifixion. His resurrection and ascension. And he served the church in Jerusalem.

And when the cup finally came to him. He drank it. James never received the seat that he asked for. At least not in the way that he imagined it. Because it was never Christ's to give. To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to give.

[5 : 34] Jesus told the brothers. But it is for those whom it has been prepared by my father. St. Jerome saw what that means. The seat is prepared in his words.

Not for a person but for a life. And given to whoever is proved worthy of it. What James received was the cup.

And in drinking it. Only by grace. He was proven worthy. The church has kept his feast for 2,000 years.

Remembering him for the thing that he did not ask for. His service. And his death. As we heard in the collect this morning.

James left his father and all that he had to follow Christ. The prayer asks that we might do the same. That we would forsake our own attachments.

[6 : 37] And follow him too. That was the shape of his whole life. Christ called him by the Sea of Galilee. And he left the boat.

And his father Zebedee. And followed our Lord. Later on the road to Jerusalem. He asked to sit at Christ's right hand.

Not yet knowing what he had asked for. And at the end. Under Herod's sword. He gave the last thing that he had. His life.

What then is asked of us this morning? We are not so different from James. We all want to be recognized.

In our work. In our families. Even in the church. Christ offers us the same cup he offered the sons of Zebedee.

[7 : 37] Though in our hands it is seldom a martyr's death. For most of us. It is serving where no one notices. And staying faithful.

When it costs us something. But nothing done in the name of our Lord Jesus. Is lost. Today the cup will be lifted.

At this altar. It is the cup of our Lord's own passion. His blood shed for us. And when we come forward to receive it.

We answer the question. He put to James. Are you able? None of us are able on our own.

And neither was James. But the Lord supplies the strength. And gives himself to us in that cup. So that we can follow.

[8 : 32] Where he leads. This is a reversal of the world's ideals. And James is an example of what the reversal looks like.

When a man gives his whole life to Christ. James asked to rule. And what he was given. Was to stoop.

And to serve his Lord. To drink of his cup. And ultimately. To die for him. Here we stand with James. And all the saints.

One cup. One body. May we. Like St. James. Serve. Where we are called. And drink the cup.

That our Lord gives us. Trusting that in his kingdom. The servants. Are the great ones. In the name of the Father. The Son.

[9 : 28] And the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.