

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Feast of St. James the Greater, Apostle

Lessons: ⁱ

The First Lesson: **Here beginneth the forty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.** ⁱⁱ

“The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch [**Bah-ROOHK**] the son of Neriah [**Nair-EYE-uh**], when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim [**Gee-HOY-uh-kimm**] the son of Josiah [**Joe-ZYE-uh**] king of Judah [**JOO-duh**], saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch [**Bah-ROOHK**]; Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.

“Thus shalt thou say unto him, The LORD saith thus; Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the first Chapter of the First Epistle General of Blessed Peter the Apostle. ⁱⁱⁱ

“... Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere

milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion [**ZYE-un**] a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew [**show**] forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[Y]ou are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

It is a very good thing that the Church has traditionally taken the effort to remember formally its past heroes of the Faith. It does this in various ways but especially by designating certain days each year for their commemoration. However, when one of those special days comes around in its yearly course, particularly one of those days that has been

placed under the patronage of some of the earliest figures in the Church, we often find ourselves scratching our heads and wondering just what it was that person did to be remembered.

This is particularly the case with the Apostle whom we remember today. The New Testament contains references to at least five users of the name “James” and I stress “users” rather than “men” because those references may have been meant to indicate five separate men^v but they may also have been intended for as few as three. All we can be certain of is that there were two separate Apostles who were named “James”, and the one we commemorate today is “James the son of Zebedee [ZEBB-ih-dee]”, commonly called “St. James the Greater”, perhaps in reference to his physical stature.

Theme:

Even when we can be pretty sure why a given individual has been selected for such special remembrance – after all, it just seems natural that we would celebrate the memories of at least the thirteen faithful Apostles – we may still be puzzled over the choice of lessons that have been appointed for our services on that occasion. Today may be one of those latter sorts of days.

At first glance, one might wonder why the Lessons we have just read were selected as being appropriate for St. James’ Day. After all, they nowhere mention St. James or do they even appear to refer to specific Old or New Testament events that could be seen as *types* or Scriptural precursors of events in St. James’ own life or ministry.

Development:

The facts about St. James the Greater of which we can be certain are sparse. He and his brother, St. John the Apostle, were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and were partners with SS. Simon (later Peter) and his brother, Andrew.^{vi} The calling of the four partners in this fishery business is recorded in several places in the Gospel;^{vii} thus James, along with John, Simon Peter, and Andrew, became very possibly the first four among the Twelve Apostles.

While all four of those fishermen were always prominent among the other Apostles,^{viii} James, John, and Simon Peter formed the innermost circle of Our Lord's intimates, the only ones present when He raised Jairus's [**JEH-russ-ez**] daughter from the dead,^{ix} at Our Lord's Transfiguration,^x and during Jesus's Agony during His final night in the Garden of Gethsemane [**Geth-SEMM-an-ee**].^{xi}

James and his brother John were apparently not only stubborn and hardy like most Galileans but hot-headed as well,^{xii} for Jesus Himself gave them the nickname "Boanerges" [**Bow-an-ER-gees**] or "Sons of Thunder".^{xiii} They were the ones for whom their mother, Salome [**Sal-OH-me**], begged Jesus to grant them places next to Him in the kingdom of Heaven.^{xiv}

Finally, we know that this St. James was martyred, probably in 44 A.D., by the Romans' puppet king, Herod Agrippa [**HAIR-udd Ah-GRIPP-ah**] I.^{xv} There is a tradition, which may be traced back to St. Clement of Alexandria, near the beginning of the Second Century, that St. James' accuser was so moved by his confession of faith that the accuser himself became a Christian and was beheaded alongside his victim.^{xvi}

In the early Ninth Century, remains claimed to be the relics of St. James were discovered at Compostela [**Comm-poh-STELL-ah**], in Galicia [**HUH-lee-see-uh**] on the Iberian [**EYE-beer-ee-un**] Peninsula, supposedly translated there from the site of his martyrdom. When the Pope of that day and several kings accepted this attribution, this place quickly became the most important site of St. James' *cultus* and the goal of the most popular pilgrimage in Medieval Europe. It also led to St. James's adoption as the patron saint of Spain under the name "Sant Iago" [**Ee-AH-go**], which comes from a local vernacular form of the Hebrew "Yakov" [**YAH-kawv**], meaning "Jacob" or "James".^{xvii}

From these few certainties, we are left simply with an image of a zealous, faithful follower of Our Lord, indeed, of a follower faithful unto death, whose example still inspires the faithful. Thus he cannot be better summed up than in the Collect for today, which sets the theme for this commemoration:

GRANT, O merciful God, that, as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.^{xviii}

Conclusion:

It is in this sense that at least today's Second Lesson is appropriate to the remembrance of a man whom Our Lord called to Himself and who, moved by the presence and words of Jesus, gave up his worldly business, trustingly followed the Messiah to the very end, so that we celebrate his salvation and exaltation:

“[Y]ou are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”^{xix}

May we, like St. James, be the people of God who once had not received His mercy but now, as His people, have received that mercy.

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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Jeremiah 45: 1-5 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *I Peter 1: 22—2: 10 (KJV).*

^{iv} *I Peter 2: 9-10 (RSV).*

^v (1) *The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, brother of the Apostle John, sometimes called “James the Greater”;* (2) *the Apostle James, the son of Alphaeus (St. Matthew 10: 3; St. Mark 3: 18; St. Luke 6: 15; Acts 1:13);* (3) *James, “the brother of the Lord” (St. Matthew 13: 55; St. Mark 6: 3; Galatians 1: 19), who may be the James of Galatians 2: 2 and 2: 9; Acts 12:17, 15:13-21, 21:18; and I*

Corinthians 15:7; (4) James, the son of Mary, brother of Joseph, sometimes called “James the Less” (St. Mark 15: 40; St. Matthew 27: 56), who was possibly James the son of Cleophas or Clopas (St. John 19: 25); and (5) James, the brother of Jude (Jude 1: 1), who has traditionally been identified with James, the brother of the Lord (cf. St. Luke 6: 16; Acts 1: 13).

^{vi} St. Luke 5: 10.

^{vii} St. Matthew 4: 18-22; St. Mark 1: 19-20; St. Luke 5: 1-11.

^{viii} Cf. St. Mark 13: 3.

^{ix} St. Mark 5: 37; St. Luke 8: 51.

^x St. Matthew 17: 1; St. Mark 9: 1; St. Luke 9: 28.

^{xi} St. Matthew 26: 37; St. Mark 14: 33.

^{xii} Cf. St. Luke 9: 49 and 9: 54.

^{xiii} St. Mark 3: 17.

^{xiv} St. Matthew 20: 21; St. Mark 10: 37.

^{xv} Acts 12: 1-2.

^{xvi} EUSEBIUS, *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH*, II, ix, 2, 3.

^{xvii} “James” is the English form of “Jaime” (pronounced HIGH-may), which is another dialectical form of “Yakov”.

^{xviii} *The Collect for St. James’ Day*, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 246 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

^{xix} *I Peter* 2: 9-10 (RSV).

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