

The Feast of Saint James the Apostle
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

This weekend we are celebrating what the Russians call our 'Name Day'. We are named for Saint James the Apostle, also called James the Greater, James son of Zebedee, or as in today's Gospel, James brother of John – and together these brothers were called Sons of Thunder, Boanerges. So these names are all our names – and today we focus on them a bit more than usual.

To have a patron saint typically means that we have a particular hero of the faith to hold up as our example of how we are meant to live, and, in the minds of some at least, we have someone in the heavenly realm to look after us.

At the very least, having a patron saint gives us a special day to celebrate each year. In cultures where name days are celebrated rather than birthdays, one shares the celebration with everyone else of the same name. So all of the Nicholases celebrate together, for example. So, today we share our feast day with all of the other Saint James the Apostle churches and hospitals and schools in the world who are named for this Saint James. (The rest celebrate in the Fall on the Feast of Saint James the Brother of our Lord)

So imagine us sharing this celebration with communities of Saint James all over the world – a really big celebration.

One thing we all have in common is the traditional symbol of Saint James, the pilgrim shell. These shells are gathered on the seashore near Saint James' traditional resting place at Compostela in Spain, one of the world's great pilgrimage destinations. So wherever communities are celebrating Saint James today, they are seeing shells, like we have on our name tags and on our banner and on this bulletin.

We are all recognizing that we are part of a great pilgrim band, led by Christ toward a new kind of kingdom.

As a community we have a name and a place and a history. We celebrated our fiftieth anniversary year remembering the people and events that have shaped the life of Saint James parish and the contributions it has made to Tigard and to the Episcopal Church in Oregon.

We have a beautiful building in a lovely spot of ground. Our building is a peaceful place which has seen numerous weddings and funerals and baptisms, gracious celebrations of Kingdom life. The atmosphere here is not suggestive of Sons of Thunder. As a whole we are not loud or pushy. A group which offers the community an outdoor labyrinth and meditative Taizé services is unlikely to get a nickname like 'Sons of Thunder'.

When Jesus gave this nickname to the fisherman sons of Zebedee, he seems to have been reacting to their impetuosity. Apparently they did stand out from the crowd (and to judge by today's Gospel their mother meant

that they should.) With the very common names of James and John, it helped to have a nickname to set them apart.

As when he called Simon 'Cephas' (Peter) the nickname seems to be an expression of affection. But perhaps like 'Cephas' it was also meant as a challenge. When Jesus gave him the nickname which is equivalent to 'Rocky', it was not because Simon Peter was a stable, reliable personality. He was in fact extremely volatile, but Jesus intended that he would become a foundation for the Church to come, so he gave him a nickname that called him to stability.

If Boanerges, whatever its form in the original Aramaic, was meant as a challenge, an invitation to James and John (and perhaps to us who bear their names), what might that challenge be?

There is clearly no particular virtue in being loud like thunder, or destructive as the accompanying lightning often is. What struck me as I thought about this, is that thunder has often been considered the Voice of God in all manner of traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, it is God who thunders, not the clouds or the storms.

It was said in the time of Jesus that the voice of God had gone silent, that the time of God speaking to the people had ended, that there were no more prophets speaking God's word to the people. And then came John the Baptist, and Jesus, God's Word in human flesh.

If James and John were to be the Sons of the Voice of God, perhaps Jesus was challenging them to bring the Voice of God to the people. Just as he told them that they would no longer catch fish, but would instead catch people, Jesus is saying that in this way they are no longer sons of Zebedee the fisherman, but sons of the Voice of God, with all of the responsibilities that entails. Perhaps it was another way of saying the same thing, calling them from their previous ordinary lives, to the lives of leaders in the new Kingdom.

It seems that James did not have long to live out this vocation, since he was the first of the Apostles to be executed. His death fulfills what Jesus says in today's Gospel - he does indeed the cup of cruel death at the hands of tyrants just like Christ himself.

But that is not the end of his story as a Son of the Voice of God.

After the crucifixion, tradition has James go off to the Roman province of Iberia (now Spain) to spread the Good News of Christ.

When he returned to Judea, the king beheaded him to please the rowdy mob. So he was bringing God's voice first through evangelism and then through martyrdom. But of more lasting impact has been the resting place of James' mortal remains in Compostela in Spain. For centuries the Camino de Santiago, the Way of Saint James, has been one of the most used and revered pilgrimages in the world. Countless people have walked or ridden along this route to gain their shell. They have found in the camaraderie of pilgrims, and the experience of meditative journey their own experiences of the voice of God in their hearts.

So how are we called to be Sons and Daughters of the Voice of God in Tigar?

The logical starting point for considering one's calling is with one's gifts. So what do we have to offer the world so much in need of the voice of God?

I return to what I already mentioned.

- We are inheritors and custodians of this lovely place in which many people have experienced their own encounters with the divine. So as children of the Voice of God, we are called to both care for the buildings and the grounds, but also to make all people welcome here, to offer them sanctuary from the crazy loud materialistic world around us. The work done at the Saint James Work Day this weekend is appropriate work for us 21st century Boanerges.
- We have our Taizé services and our Labyrinth both of which invite people with no familiarity with our traditions to come to the quiet and find the voice of God waiting for them.
- One of the most distinctive gifts of this Saint James parish is the consistently warm welcome it offers. This is commented on by visitors and newcomers alike. In this welcome we are able to embody the loving embrace which God offers to all people.
- Spain is not only the home of the Compostela pilgrimage; it is also the home of Cursillo. Pilgrimage to Compostela was an important aspect of the spiritual life of Eduardo Aguiló, the founder of the Cursillo movement, Aguiló heard the voice of God in his own life and strove to make that experience possible to all people. This Cursillista spirit is alive and well here at Saint James,. A remarkable percentage of our members volunteer for local Cursillos – appropriate work for the Sons and Daughters of the Voice of God. This parish offers a home both to people for whom Cursillo is deeply important and to those whose spiritual paths do not include it – acknowledging the many ways people encounter the Voice of God.
- What we see up here by the altar and in the Narthex, our gifts to the Caring Closet and to William Temple House, gifts to those most in need are another appropriate expression of our vocation to be children of the Voice of God. As we have heard consistently this year, God's arms are eternally stretched out for us, inviting us into loving relationship; his words and words of invitation and acceptance, meant for everyone. One way people experience that voice calling to them is when they receive freely offered food or clothing, or whatever they most need in times of crisis. It is our Name Day and on our Name Day we give gifts to the world around us, give as God gives, freely and openly. Children of Thunder, children of the Voice of God, the hands and feet of the Love of God – that is us. As the community of Saint James, it is our calling, our privilege, our gift.