

## St. James the Elder: July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### “Exposing Words”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we remember St. James, the Elder. The Treasury of Daily Prayer highlights a few historical points, “*St. James and his brother John, sons of Zebedee and Salome (see Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40), were fishermen in the Sea of Galilee who were called with Peter and his brother Andrew to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22). In the Gospel lists of Jesus’ disciples, James is listed following Peter and preceding John. Together, these three appear as leaders of the Twelve. Because James precedes John, it is reasoned that James is the elder of the brothers. The Book of Acts records that James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I, probably between AD 42 and 44 (Acts 12:1-2). Thus James is the first of the Twelve to die a martyr.*”<sup>1</sup>

One of the standout teaching points in the Gospels concerning James we hear from Mark today. James and his brother have a request of Jesus. To put the best construction on this, we might say that they were thinking of earthly things; they believed Jesus had to die, and so this request is one that is simply looking out to continue the teachings of Jesus. What we learn is that their request is asked in ignorance.

But the ten weren’t happy with James and John. They were blinded in their own prideful spirits of death. They were far from putting the best construction on anything. Jesus rebukes the ten strongly, “***You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.***”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Treasury of Daily Prayer, pg. 559

<sup>2</sup> Mark 10:42–45

This week at VBS, we learned three important Hebrew words: *Cahchad* – which means hide, *pane**h*—which means face, and *ruach*—which means spirit, breath, or wind. The sinful nature doesn't like to be exposed, it would rather cover its own shame. Adam sought to cover his nakedness with a leaf, James tried to cover his shameful pride for power with a simple request.

James spoke with the same God as Adam, and in the same way had his sin exposed. God desires to speak with man face to face, and in the judgment of sin a promise was given, the Gospel was spoken. Adam was promised a savior who would crush Satan's head, and James here hears Jesus is that seed who will give His life as a ransom for many.

The importance of Spirit, breath and wind is how the Church lives. Wind is abundant in Iowa; thus, we are given ample reminders for the Holy Spirit's work. This word in Hebrew also means breath, and with your breath, wind moves through your vocal cords producing words. It is precisely here where James, and the rest of the apostles, are caught in words of death. They are shown how their words are not produced by the Spirit of God, but from a prideful, spirit of death.

At first the Law Jesus speaks seems to be "Don't be proud, ambitious." That is certainly the lesson the ten take. Jesus highlights the Gentiles, and there are many examples where we see this tyrannical spirit of death in the Scriptures. The Medes, also known as the Persians, were famous for this sort of abuse. Their kings ruled over them as tyrants, thinking they were gods. This is our default, American way of thinking about one man ruling over another. We think of kings, dictators, and abuses of power. This is America's mother's milk, propaganda first introduced to entice us to rebel against the king in England and since used to justify every war, especially the cold war, since.

But there are more Gentiles in the world than the Persians. There were also the Greeks. They ruled over one over another by a mob called democracy. The Athenian mob condemned Socrates to death because he was uppity. His trial is strikingly like that of Our Lord's.

The ten want to keep James and John in their place. They thought James and John were uppity. They got rebuked. Because they, the ten, were seeking to rule over the two. The sons of thunder were actually handled rather delicately. Their request was respected. They do not know what they are asking, but, nonetheless, they are asking for a noble thing.

If James and John overstep their bounds a bit, at least it is in the way of apostles, asking to be at Our Lord's side, to be a part of His kingdom. The ten, not the two, were conceited. They were stupidly jealous in their demand for equality, their fear of being under anyone else, or never wanting anyone to rise. They were like playground bullies who beat up the smart kids until the smart kids start acting dumb.

This is a hard lesson for us. We instinctively think of the virtues of democracy. It is hard for us to think that democracies would ever be evil. But the Weimar Republic, not so different in form than our government, elected Adolf Hitler and empowered him to nationalize the country and enact his terrible laws. So also was slavery endorsed and promoted by our own democracy as well as other crimes. To this day, in our country, by the work of our democracy, abortion is not a crime, but receives federal funding and is upheld as medicine.

Well does the Psalm sing,

*“Put not your trust in princes,  
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.  
4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;  
on that very day his plans perish.  
5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God,  
6 who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them,  
who keeps faith forever.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 146:3–6

All forms of government are subject to abuse and have their weaknesses. Look again at the admonition of Jesus toward the ten. The problem is not that the two are uppity, but that the ten are jealous and want to keep them down.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Law of God shines on your hearts calling you to repent. Not only are you not better than other people, but there are, in fact, people better than you, people smarter, harder working, busier, kinder, more generous. Don't take that away from them. Don't try to pretend it isn't so; instead, strive to be like them.

Make no mistake, there is Law here also for the sons of thunder. Jesus tells them, "You will drink the cup of sorrow, of unjust punishment. You will be martyred and thus purified of ambition." They too are admonished and called to repent. Life is hard. Cancer comes. Depression threatens. Children leave. Pain is constant. Death is ever-present. You are not above your Master. The cross is mandatory. All disciples carry a cross. Do not rebel against it, but take it up and follow Jesus. Learn to be content, to trust that God is good in the midst of sorrow. You do not get to choose your own cross or your own glory. God is too good for that. He knows you better than yourself.

That Law and threat, that accusation and call to repentance, has but one goal. It drives you to the pure, perfect, unshakable, holy promise of God. You do not drink the cup alone. The cup you drink in Holy Communion and in sorrow is the Cup He drank, the death you die in Holy Baptism and in your daily battle against your fallen flesh is the death He has died for you. The sorrow you endure is a purification, a realigning, a holy chastisement. Almost a year ago, when the wind blew and destroyed those earthly riches and homely treasures we hold so dear, we were reminded that real, eternal treasures are God's Word and Sacrament, where moth and rust cannot destroy, and thieves cannot break-in and steal.

In these things and more, we are brought by the Spirit, to Wisdom; Wisdom, Jesus, comes through suffering. But even more than that, you will come through death and follow Jesus in the Resurrection. Your treasure is in heaven. This is not your home. Jesus says to James and John, "You will be my men, my ambassadors, sent with my authority in My Name, and come home to My home when you have been baptized in the Baptism with which I am baptized."

So also there is Gospel here for those who have made democracy a god, for the envious ten, for Americans, for even you brothers and sisters. For never was a Man more excellent than all of us at our best, than the Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Without sin, He came to be with us face to face, to bring us face to face with God. He hid himself under the form of simple man and exposed His glory on the cross.

He endured our fallen breath, suffered our poisoned words, bore our petty remarks and slander and all manner of sins, allowed us to drag Him down, to make the First the last, until He served us with His death, handing over His life for us, ransoming us out of Hell and lifting us up to His own rightful place, with His Father, forgiven, restored, cleansed, free. He became a slave of all that you would be first. He gave His life as a ransom that you would be rescued.

This is better than being equal. Because the Lord doesn't redeem us into some communist utopia where everyone is the same, but rather into a paradise where everyone is free to be who he really is. When Peter, James, and John, see Moses and Elijah in heaven on the Mount of Transfiguration, they recognize them. Moses and Elijah retain their personalities, their characteristics. They are still themselves, only more so, for now they are redeemed and confirmed in bliss, they are their true selves, without sin or selfishness, as they were meant to be.

There is great joy in this. The ten were envious, the two were ambitious and proud. All were sinful, but none, not even Judas, were unredeemable. Jesus did not give up on them. He did not brain wash them either. He let them be themselves. He uncovered their hiddenness. He spoke with them face to face. He gave them His Holy Spirit. He rebuked them, but He also forgave them. His cleansing is not a change in substance any more than changing out of dirty clothes and taking a bath is. He simply strips away the false stuff, the confusion, the corruption, the sin. It washes down the drain and into the sewer to mingle with the Blood that flowed down Golgotha and into Gehenna. What is left is what He created, and He declares it to be good.

This means your loved ones will still be your loved ones in heaven. You will still love them there for the same reasons you love them now only more purely, more fiercely, more truly. It also means the personality and gifts the Lord has given you are not accidental but purposeful. Not everyone will be the same in heaven. We will not all be equal. The twelve will seat on twelve thrones. And someone, it seems, will sit on Our Lord's right and on His left. And it will be good even if we think on earth that it is not fair.

What a wonderful irony it would be, if having asked in Jesus' Name, we find in heaven that St. James, the first of the twelve to be martyred, and St. John, the last, were seated there, on Our Lord's right and left, with their mother Salome, beaming in perfect grace, behind them, and we in perfect harmony sing with them,

“Christ, the life of all the living,  
Christ, the death of death, our foe,  
Who, Thyself for me once giving  
To the darkest depths of woe:  
Through Thy suff'rings, death, and merit  
I eternal life inherit.  
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,  
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.”<sup>4</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Christ, the Life of All the Living LSB 420:1

**Prayer of the Church**  
**Eighth Sunday after Trinity**  
**25 July 2021**

O gracious God, Your servant and apostle James, by Your Holy Spirit, was not afraid to expose the truth, even in the face of unpopularity and death. Help us by Your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to hold fast Your Word in hearts that You have cleansed that thereby we may be made strong in faith and perfect in holiness and be comforted in life and death. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Laurie and Danielle*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Timothy, Ty, and Duane* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all nations, direct and defend all who make, administer and judge our laws. Bless and protect our soldiers, police and all those who work to keep our communities safe. Keep us all from violence, discord and confusion, from pride and arrogance, and from every evil course of action. Teach us to grow in virtue and live in peace with everyone. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, You are a fortress to Your people. In Your temple, we think on Your steadfast love in Christ. Hear us on behalf of all who need healing, strength and comfort [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Donna, Floyd Doughty and those we name in our hearts*]. Defend them from the attacks of the evil one, and cause them to join in Your praise. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, through Your Son, our Good Shepherd, You care for Your flock in this world. Direct, defend and bless all pastors as they care for the Church which Christ obtained with His own blood. Strengthen them as faithful shepherds and overseers, especially as they feed Your flock the very body and blood of Christ, that there would be no division among Your sheep but all would be united by Your truth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, protect Your flock from the wolves that seek to mislead and devour the sheep through their false teaching. Give us discernment to test them against Your Word and so recognize false prophets by their bad fruit. Preserve Your Church in the pure doctrine of Your Word, that the good fruit of salvation would be offered to all who hear and believe; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**