

Wednesday October 23, 2019 – James of Jerusalem

Matthew 13:54-58, Acts 15:12-22

Holy Trinity, Pembroke

The Rev. Gillian Hoyer

One year ago today, on October 23, 2018, there were about 225 people crammed into Holy Trinity at 7 o'clock in the evening. These pews up here in the choir were full of people wearing the choir robes of Holy Trinity, the choir robes of St Paul's Cobden and Stafford, the choir robes of Ascension Killaloe and St John's Eganville.

One year ago today we held the Celebration of New Ministry for the Parish of the Valley.

We chose this day, the day we remember James of Jerusalem, James the brother of Jesus, not because it was an auspicious day to hold the service, but because it was literally the only day that we could get Bishop John and Archbishop Fred in the room at the same time!

But... I think that the Lord was working it out for us, because, one year later and looking back, I think the memorial of James of Jerusalem was appropriate for us as a parish.

James was the brother of Jesus.

He isn't mentioned very much in the gospels, other than readings like the one we just heard from the gospel of Matthew. His mentions are pretty much limited to naming him as Jesus' brother.

It is in the book of Acts where we get a sense of who James was.

The early church, in those first couple of years and decades following the death and resurrection of Jesus, was a little bit fractured. Primarily, the conflict was between Judean followers of Jesus – those who kept all of the laws of the Torah and considered themselves devout Jews who followed Jesus, and Gentile followers of Jesus – those who were Greek or Roman or Syrian or some other nationality.

The conflict was over whether or not all of these Gentile believers first needed to convert to Judaism in order to properly follow Jesus. Namely – did they need to get circumcised in order to follow Jesus. Some were adamantly for circumcision – James and many of Jesus' disciples amongst them.

Others, namely the apostle Paul, were adamantly against making Gentiles adhere to this and other Judean laws in order to follow Jesus.

It all came to a head when Paul and his helpers came to Jerusalem to ask for help for their mission to the gentiles in Asia.

James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and he held a meeting where all of the “sides” were able to put their case.

In the end, James accepted Paul's argument, acknowledging that Paul's mission to the Gentiles was God's mission. Part of his speech,

which we read from the book of Acts, acknowledges that God has been doing this work of bringing them together since before Paul even came on the scene. He references Peter's vision and encounter with Gentiles who became strong followers of Jesus and says that he realizes that "God has been making these things known from long ago."

Because of this, James is honoured for his "reconciling wisdom"ⁱ as one who overcame his own prejudices – overcame those barriers that I talked about last Sunday, the ones that we put up in the way, not the ones that God puts in the way – overcame his own barriers that prevented unity in the church in order to create a united early Christian church that went on to spread and endure all the way up until today.

So why do I think that James of Jerusalem is a good saint for us to have here in the Parish of the Valley?

Simply for the way that he worked to keep God at the centre of things and sought to remain open to different people, different ways of doing things, different parts of the church coming together in a unified mission and purpose.

See where I'm going with this?

Eighteen months, one year ago, many of us were still sceptical that this thing called the Parish of the Valley would work. We weren't

sure what we were getting into. We didn't know each other, we hadn't done things with folks from other Anglican Churches in the Valley.

One year later, we still haven't got it all figured out, but we've realized that we're stronger together. That we like hanging out with each other in worship and in fellowship. That we can accomplish so much more for the kingdom of God if we stick together than if we get worked up over slight differences in how we worship (because each of our churches across the Parish does things slightly differently!) or slight differences in who makes up our congregations.

So as we remember James of Jerusalem today, I give thanks for the reconciling work done by James 2000 years ago, and the reconciling work that brings us all together across the Parish of the Valley each. Thanks be to God for this community and this parish.

Amen.

ⁱ From *For All The Saints*