

Feast of St. James the Fisherman  
The Rev. Brenda Husson, preacher

celebrated July 22, 2018

Jeremiah 45:1-5  
Acts 11:27-12:3  
Matthew 20: 20-28  
(Matthew 4:18-22)

There are two things I look forward to each summer. The first is swimming in salt water. So I am really, really happy to be on the Cape and thankful to Tracey and all of you for making that possible. The second is reading. I read some during the year, but when vacation comes, suddenly it seems there is time for books, all sorts of books and I can read them during the day, at night or in the middle of the afternoon. Whenever I want.

Perhaps it's the clarity of a book's narrative arc that draws me in: there's a beginning, a middle and an end. And today, happily, on this feast of St. James' we don't get theology in the scripture readings appointed, but story. Yet sadly, the beginning has been left out.

Fortunately, many of us here know how James' story begins: with James and his brother John by the Sea of Galilee, just like Peter and his brother Andrew, because all four of them are fishermen. But unlike Peter and his brother, James and John aren't our fishing. Instead they're engaged in the timeless, necessary and tedious task of such fishermen in every age. They are mending nets. Jesus asks them to follow him – and off they go. Probably quite relieved to leave their net mending tasks behind.

Today's Gospel gives us the middle of James' story, even if it comes near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, but James and the rest of Jesus' crew have quite a ways to go in their understanding of discipleship. Having been told by Jesus not once, not twice, but three times that he is going to suffer and die; despite the fact that they are now within the walls of Jerusalem and the enthusiasm of the crowds is being more than matched by the alarm of the religious authorities, James and John see only glory ahead. And they want to be in on it: at the front of the line and with the best seats in the house. They clearly have some inkling that this request may not be well received, which is why they put their mother out front.

Their suspicions are correct. Jesus is not pleased and has words for James, for John and for the other ten too. For Jesus knows, clearly, the arc of *his* ministry, its narrative structure. Knows where he started, where he now stands and where he will finish. And glory, at least as the disciples understand such things, has nothing to do with it. So while Jesus assures James that he will indeed drink from the same cup as Jesus, Jesus knows that is the cup of suffering.

Jesus knows that they will all discover the cost of their discipleship. The cost of proclaiming and living a way of life that runs counter to the way of the world. The cost of insisting that the powers of this world are as nothing compared to the power of God. The cost of swearing allegiance to the reign of Christ, rather than to the rulers of this age. The end of James'

earthly story, once he fully chooses that path, comes quickly. For after Jesus' death and resurrection, James insistently proclaims and enacts the power of the risen Lord and so Herod, the puppet king enthroned in Jerusalem, dispatches him with the sword.

End of story. Except of course it's not. If it were we wouldn't be here in this chapel named for James. Wouldn't remember him nearly 2,000 years after his martyrdom.

In his four quartets, T.S. Eliot, the great English poet, wrote: "...the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." When we consider James and what his story might say to us, I think we do well to return to the place where it began. Back by the Sea of Galilee.

When Jesus called Peter, he told him he would fish for people. He made no such promise to James. But I believe the mention of net mending in the account of James' call is not merely there to add a bit of local color. Rather I think Jesus knew and wanted James and all of us to know that the mending of the world matters every bit as much as fishing for people. Every time Jesus healed someone, every time he forgave someone, every time he welcomed those society cast to the margins, fed the hungry or declared against all evidence that the poor, the meek and the mournful are blessed, Jesus demonstrated what a mended world, a world set to rights, looks like. Each action and every teaching an illustration of the reign and realm of God.

In our own day and age when the fabric of society is quite intentionally, intentionally, being torn to shreds, the sometimes tedious work of net mending has never been more necessary. Perhaps it is feeding the hungry, working in the midterm elections, rescuing endangered species or fighting for gun control or civil rights. The list of nets needing mending is nearly limitless. And can seem endless and because endless, tedious.

But vital. It is also vital that we testify that we do the work we do because it is the work and will of God; work that is righteous because it is about setting the world to rights. Not so that we can be thanked or glorified: that is not, as Jesus knew and James learned, is not where working to build God's kingdom leads, but when so many claim authority illegitimately, we must proclaim that the only true authority rests with God.

It may not seem like enough. Taking up a collection for those suffering from a famine probably didn't seem like much either, but even that was not the way of the world then. Fortunately God's ways are not ours. God sent Jesus and Jesus gathered a small band of disciples around him, men and women the world easily discounted and ultimately discarded. But we worship here in a chapel named for St. James', not for Herod. So we do not lose heart.

It's often said that it's not where you start but where you finish, and that is true. But it is equally true that if you start with Jesus' call to follow him wherever and whenever he lays claim to us, we will finish where we should, and with a story of discipleship worth remembering.