

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

James the Elder. Today is his day in the church calendar.

We give thanks for his witness and ministry in the name of Jesus.

We remember James the Elder's life and his death as the first martyr among the twelve disciples, as we heard in the Acts reading this morning.

*In our worship space, James the Elder is up near the top behind the altar,
He is the second one down on the right, holding a pilgrim's staff and scroll.*

In Spain, there is a pilgrimage that has been walked since the early middle ages that is named for him, "The Way of St. James," which is why he is often depicted holding the staff. The pilgrim staff also sets him apart from the other James, son of Alphaeus who was one of the twelve disciples as well.

*We might remember James the Elder as one of those Zebedee boys
who left their father and their nets to follow Jesus.*

We might remember him as one of three

who accompanied Jesus up the mountain to the Transfiguration.

*James the Elder is also known for his encounter with Jesus in our gospel this morning,
for his request to have a special seat next to Jesus in glory.*

In a sermon on this text, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. points out a human condition, a human tendency that he names "The Drum Major Instinct."¹

The Drum Major Instinct, King explains, is the need to be out in front, at the head of the parade.

The need to be the center of attention.

This "drum major instinct" is the "all about me" as we call it today.

*Instead of taking into consideration the needs of other,
the concerns of neighbor or community,
world or creation,
we err on the side of, well, me.*

*The "all about me" is this "drum major instinct,"
the "I want what I want when I want it."*

The way King describes it, we might quickly ascribe this condition to only the extroverted brothers and sisters among us, but this "drum major instinct" is just as much a condition experienced among our introverts. That the world revolves around me can be just as much about the full attention given to book, to hobby, to self-interest, to alone time.

James the Elder and his little brother John are battling their "drum major instinct" in this morning's gospel reading.

Jesus, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

Jesus, grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.

Jesus, give us special seats, the good seats.

¹ The Historic "Drum Major Instinct Speech" was delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, on 4 February 1968. MLKEC. Available at: <http://www.blackwebportal.com/wire/DA.cfm?ArticleID=513>.

Jesus, let us sit in the box with you, not in the bleachers.

Now, the gospel writer Matthew takes it a little easier on these brothers than Mark does. In Matthew's account, he has Mother Zebedee make the request to Jesus on behalf of her sons.² It makes them easier for us to like that way. But in the Mark version of this story, the one before us this morning, James and John sure are guilty of the "all about me."

Let us have the good seats, they plead.

What is Jesus' response? Typical of Jesus' conversation style, he responds first with a question. He doesn't rebuke James and John like he often rebukes Peter. Instead, Jesus says,

*You do not know what you are asking.
Are you able to drink the cup that I drink,
or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?*

When the brothers respond that they are able, we assume they don't entirely know what they are saying. They don't know what they are getting themselves into. Jesus assures them that they will drink the cup and be baptized as he will be.

When the other disciples hear this, they are enraged.

"Why do they get the good seats and we don't?" We might imagine them muttering.

"Jesus is playing favorites again. He likes their ministry better than ours," they might whisper.

Jesus meets the others right where they are just as Jesus met James and John. Your call is not to be the greatest, he reminds them all. Your call is to be servants. Servants. Hmph.

*Instead of leading the parade,
instead of putting on the fancy drum major hat,
instead of leading out in front,
instead of wanting what they want when they want it,
they are to serve as Jesus served.*

The good news in this text comes in Jesus as servant.

The good news comes in Jesus as the drum major, the one out in front.

Jesus, who loved.

Jesus, who ate with some strange and even controversial company.

Jesus, who went to cross and to the grave for the sins of the world.

Jesus, as ultimate servant turns the "all about me" into "all about others."

When we think about Jesus as servant, it's a different kind of parade.

It's not about the greatest appearance or the greatest program.

It's not about the special seat or fancy outfit.

It's not about the most money or the best tradition.

When we see Jesus as our Lord, as our Drum Major, it's all about service.

It's about sharing Jesus love.

It's about helping neighbor in need.

It's about welcoming the outsider into the body of Christ.

***When we know Jesus as God's ultimate love for us, for all creation,
it becomes about service and not about seating.***

² Matthew 20.20-28.

*If we're not the drum majors,
if we are to turn around this "Drum Major Instinct,"
then what are we to be?*

I remember when my older sister, Kim the Elder (if you will) was in high school. Kim was in the color guard and later on the dance team. She had to, she got to, march in all the parades and perform at the football games.

I remember my mom volunteering as a band parent. There were fundraisers, all those boxes of candy. There were uniform fittings and then snack bar duty. The parents had to fill water bottles before the parade and walk alongside the band.

My mom and other band parents, in effect, took on the role of servant and most definitely not the role of drum major. They walked behind or beside, not at the center, assisting the young band members when heat or sun became too much.

Band parents.

This is the life to which Jesus calls James and John.

This is the life to which Jesus calls you and me.

Not so much drum major, that role's already been taken.

So, not drum major, more band parent.

Not Lord and Savior, more servant and disciple.

We are called to a servant life, my brothers and sisters.

not a life of "look at me, look at me."

We are called to a servant life,

a life that proclaims, "look at Jesus, look God's love in the world."

To the glory of God.