

Sunday 30th July – St James Patronal

Acts 11:27-12:2

2 Corinthians 4:7-15

Matthew 20:20-28

During the lockdown we tried lots of new things; we pushed our knowledge to its limits; we did things we never imagined ourselves doing. Using zoom for the first time; experimenting with YouTube videos; live streaming from church and taking our first steps in video-editing.

And we kept reminding ourselves of a mantra:

Good enough is good enough.

We could have spent countless hours trying to get things perfect, but actually it wouldn't make a lot of difference. It wasn't the final quality of the video that mattered, what mattered was that it was there at all. What mattered was that the message got out there.

Sometimes our desire for perfection and our knowledge that we can't achieve it stops us from doing anything at all. We think we are not good enough.

Last Tuesday 25th July was the feast day of St James the Great – to whom this church is dedicated. Known as James the Great not because of any status, but apparently because of his age or his size. The older or the taller as opposed to James the Less, the younger, or the shorter.

James the Great was one of the first disciples of Jesus – you may recall the story. He and his brother John, along with Peter and his brother Andrew, were fishermen on Lake Galilee. They heard Jesus preaching to the crowds and decided to follow him, to learn more about him; leaving their nets behind. We probably remember Jesus saying that they would no longer be catching fish, but would now be catching people.

There's not a lot about James in the Bible after that story of him deciding to follow Jesus. We do know, however, that he was one of the inner group of three disciples along with Peter and John. It was the three of them that accompanied Jesus at the transfiguration – they had the enormous privilege of seeing him in his full glory and hearing those wonderful words from heaven – This is my Son, listen to him! And it

was the same three who were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prayed before his arrest and trial.

We know too that James and his brother John were called Sons of Thunder – perhaps referring to their fiery tempers. There is a story in Luke’s gospel where the brothers call down fire from heaven on the unwelcoming people of a Samaritan village – for which they are rebuked by Jesus. Hardly a flattering tale!

The event in our gospel reading doesn’t show them in a good light either. Their mother asking Jesus that they be given places of honour in his Kingdom. In fact in Mark’s gospel the account paints an even less favourable picture of them – Mark writes in his account that it is the disciples themselves asking for the place of honour.

The only other reference to James in scripture is the short account of his death in Acts. A martyr’s death. Tradition has it that his remains are in the Cathedral of Santiago del Compostela in Spain – the endpoint of a popular pilgrimage route – the Camino de Santiago or Way of St James.

So despite the name James the Great it is clear even from the little information we have in scripture that he was a flawed individual, he was far from perfect. He had a temper; he had inflated ideas of his status, he fell asleep on the job. And yet he was loved and valued by Jesus.

In the reading from 2 Corinthians Paul picks up the theme of God using flawed individuals. The whole letter is a curious blend of Paul making bold claims about himself, but also being honest about his weaknesses and failings.

In today’s short passage, Paul marvels that God uses ordinary people with all their weaknesses to carry his precious message of salvation to the world. *We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.*

This passage resonates with me – and I wonder if it does with you. I wonder too if it would for St James. We ourselves are like clay jars. Imperfect; unattractive; unworthy of the message we live out.

The important thing about James was not his failings or his weaknesses, was not his temper or his inflated view of himself. It was that he decided to follow Jesus, to learn from him (that’s what being a disciple means), to step in faith into the

unknown and to trust in God. The important thing was his willingness to be a means of spreading the gospel message.

The important thing isn't the jar, but the contents – the gospel itself. God uses people despite their weaknesses and failings rather than just because of their strengths and abilities. And this can be a great encouragement to us.

God wants us – with all our imperfections - to be involved in his mission too.

And he wants us to be part not because we are special, not because of our skills and abilities, but because we are ordinary human beings loved and cared for by him. People who want to learn more about him and grow in our faith. Each with our own needs and failings.

What he is asking us to do is simply to show the love of Jesus as we live.

This could be through doing things through the church, but we can also show the love of Jesus through our family life, our secular employment, our involvement in the community. By just the way we live.

There are countless possibilities

- Speaking to the new person who comes into church;
- stopping to say good morning to the Big Issue seller or the homeless person – treating them as a human being loved by God;
- being prepared to talk about what we believe, despite not knowing all the answers (because none of us know all the answers)
- welcoming the families who come to have their children baptised
- Doing the shopping or running errands for our neighbours.
- Sharing our faith with our children and perhaps more particularly our grandchildren – perhaps bringing them to church or Messy Church.
- Getting involved in helping to make the world a better place – perhaps through campaigning and lobbying

or some practical things as on the notice sheet this week

- helping at the Welcome café
- assisting with English conversation classes for Ukrainians

Sometimes we find it hard putting ourselves forwards. We hold back. We make excuses as to why it shouldn't be me, but someone else. We ask questions like:

Have I got the skills to do this task?
Am I good enough?
Do I know enough?
Isn't there someone more suited?
What if I make a mess of it?
What will other people think?

We don't have to have it all sorted. We don't need to be experts; we don't need to get it right all the time; we simply need to be willing to be used. To follow as James followed Jesus; to grow in our faith and understanding. To do whatever God calls us to do to the best of our ability. To be the very best me I can be.

And God will always be there alongside us through his Spirit. He will give us the opportunities, give us the confidence and often the words to say.

And we will have the assurance that we are doing the will of God. We will have the support of other Christians around us. Praying with us and for us. Saying the right words at the right times. Encouraging us when we most need it.

And we will have the knowledge that Jesus said he would never leave us. He will always be here alongside us and living within us through his Spirit.

That was the experience of the James and the other disciples, and it can be ours too.