

Today we remember James', the patron saint from whom our congregation gets its name. It's a time to remember – to look at James' life and his journey as a disciple and apostle of Jesus. It's a time to also ask how James' life might inspire us as we strive to grow as disciples of Jesus.

Two millennia ago James and his brother John were working along side their father in the family fishing business. One day, a stranger comes walking along the shore where they are mending their nets, stops, looks at them, and then calls out: "Follow me!" And thus begins their journey and growth as disciples of Jesus. James didn't always get it "right" as evidenced by today's gospel reading. But he did grow as a disciple. How did that happen?

I suggest that James grew as a disciple the same way we today can grow as disciples: through **worship, spiritual formation, and service**. James followed Jesus and that's what Jesus did.

We know that Jesus regularly went to the synagogue and the temple in Jerusalem to worship. And his disciples went with him. This was a regular part of being with Jesus. We also know that Jesus prayed – a lot, often going off by himself to pray, but sometimes taking he took some of the disciples with him (amongst whom James was often one). Worship and Prayer – these were a regular part of life with Jesus – life as a disciple of Jesus.

We also know that Jesus spent a great of time during his earthly ministry **PREACHING** and **TEACHING**. We know from the gospels that he taught the crowds – e.g. the Sermon on the Mount. He also spent time alone with his disciples, teaching them. And James and the other disciples were with Jesus, listening and learning, reflecting and growing. If Jesus thought it was important for the people and his disciples to learn, then it must also be important for us to learn – to likewise sit at the feet of Jesus to learn.

But Jesus also exercised a powerful healing ministry in the world. In today's gospel he speaks of the importance of being a servant as he himself came to serve. Jesus reached out to people who were on the margins of society; he touched those who were considered outcasts. He fed hungry crowds. As his followers, we are called to go and do likewise.

A theme for us here at St. James' Church, which you've already heard mentioned in different venues is: ***Growing as a disciple of Jesus through Worship, Spiritual Formation (Christian Education), Service***. This morning we have invited some members of congregation to share how they have grown as disciples through these three pillars of Christian discipleship.

Worship: Trish Powell and Son, Nick Tondravi

Trish: When Cindy called and asked if we would be willing to participate in the service – I heard opportunity;

Nick: When Mom mentioned it to me – I heard 'here my mom goes again', just like when they are short an acolyte and mom thinks opportunity and I think: I'm missing Bible Jeopardy with Mr. B – and heaven forbid the girls win this round; and I have to sit still through the whole service; and she's going to expect me to wear nice shoes, long pants; and comb my hair. Don't get me wrong – worship is important to me and I'll tell you how in a minute – but mom, you don't need to jump at every opportunity.

Trish: When we read the Gospel for this week, my first thought was – I get this and it's a tough balance – feeling good about serving God without wanting some sort of credit for doing so. But in thinking a little more about it I was also a little embarrassed about the task ahead. It felt like a

bit of a setup given the Gospel reading for today. So Cindy you want Nick and me to say something profound about worship, creating an expectation that we have something meaningful to share with a congregation of people who are more devoted, do more for others, pray more, and have a deep relationship with God; all this juxtaposed with James' and John's mother (who some sources say was put up to it by her sons) asking for Jesus to seat them in a place of honor at his right and left hand. Great, just great.

So all Nick and I can offer today is to humbly share the place worship has in our life, in our family and how it helps us to become more of who we want to be and hopefully who God wants us to be.

Nick: I sometimes grumble about going to church on Sunday morning – especially after a grueling week of school, homework, swim practice, etc. Of course, I'm 13 so I grumble a lot in general...

But oddly, when I miss out on Church I feel that something is missing, for the day and for the week ahead. I also feel that way if I don't say my prayers at night before I turn in. It's not a long prayer, and it's not sophisticated, but it makes me reflect, if only briefly, on what I'm thankful for (and what others around me may not have), who needs God's help and by extension who might benefit by something small I could do. As we went through the elements of the Lord's Prayer during the Lenten series, I found how closely what I say parallels the structure. By starting with what I'm grateful for it takes the 'poor me' aspect out of a less than perfect day, suddenly things that had me wrapped begin to lose their hold and gratitude slowly infuses my consciousness. Then we list those we know who could use God's help, whether it is a good friend's aunt with terminal brain cancer, an uncle out of work for close to a year, a friend with a broken arm or the rector's of our own church. And by asking for help we start to look for places we might fit in – not as often or as much as we should ... but this is a journey and we are a work in progress.

So in conclusion – maybe what's missing when we skip church or fall asleep on the couch before saying a prayer is the chance to see how much we have been given and to grow into how much we can give. And it's a loss each time we miss those opportunities.

Spiritual Formation: David Berthiaume

Good morning. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Dave Berthiaume. My wife Laura and I have attended St. James for four years and we have three kids. I have a confession to make this morning. My spiritual journey is a work in progress. I struggle with my faith. It has been this way for many years. I think it goes back to being a freshman in college, and getting a call from my mom. She explained that my Dad had passed away suddenly of a massive heart attack. I asked the question that so many ask at a time of loss and tragedy – why God, why now? Why take a good man in the prime of his life? I need him, my brother and my mom need him, why are you punishing us, why are you punishing me now?

At that point, I started to stray from regular attendance at the church, and started to question the beliefs that I had been raised with as a Catholic. I felt abandoned by Jesus, and my attendance at worship became less and less frequent. Fortunately, I met and married a committed Christian, and she has led by example by attending church and making sure the kids regularly attend Sunday school. The doubts have persisted for me though.

As part of and to further my spiritual journey, I decided several years ago to volunteer to teach Sunday school. For the last two years, I have taught middle schoolers with Phil Willems. And it's time for another confession – the experience of teaching 6th, 7th and 8th graders has had a strong effect on me, and my belief in God. I know I have benefitted more from seeing the work

of the Lord through the faces and the answers of my students than they might have benefitted from a particularly well-designed lesson plan.

I want to share one class with you to help you understand what I mean. With the help of Laura, I designed a lesson plan featuring the songs and lyrics of the Irish rock band U2, and in particular their songs that were directly taken from passages in the Bible. We all listened to the song *40* and then the class read Psalm 40 and saw where the band had borrowed and paraphrased from the Bible.

I then asked the class to split up in groups and write a ballad based on a Psalm of their choice. I left the room for a moment to get a snack for everyone, and when I returned I felt the power of the holy spirit all through the class – all 14 students in the class on task, writing and working together, to craft powerful and heartfelt ballads. It was an extremely powerful moment for me. (Another confession -- I'm used to lots of talking and pillows being thrown around from time to time.)

St. James' Christian education program is more than just a Sunday school class from 10 to 11 on Sundays. It's an opportunity to further your spiritual journey and become closer to God. If you don't believe me, stop by and visit our Sunday school classes sometime – and I know you will see the holy spirit at work.

Service: Scott Harris

Well first off, I want to thank Cindy and everyone here for the opportunity to talk a little bit this morning about service, which is undoubtedly a critical part of every individual's spiritual life and certainly a very vibrant – and deliberate – piece of what goes on here at St. James. Some of you may know me but many of you may not. My name is Scott Harris and my wife Lindsey and I have been with St. James' for only about 15 months now. You actually may be more familiar with our daughter Caroline, who was baptized here almost exactly one year ago. If you've ever noticed a little voice occasionally cheering at the conclusion of a hymn, then you may be familiar with some of my daughter's work.

I'm speaking here today about service because I am lucky enough to be a part of St. James' Earth Stewardship Commission. As part of this commission, I've participated in stream cleanups and am working to improve energy efficiency and water pollution right here at St. James'. On my own time, I correspond with my elected leaders in Congress on environmental issues, I have helped make my workplace more efficient and sustainable, and I'm also an activist of sorts in my own home, to the occasional chagrin of my wife.

To me, environmental activism embodies the old phrase “think globally, act locally,” since the little decisions we make in this area can have a real effect. I believe that God entrusted this planet and everything on it to our care and we have a responsibility to Him and to those who come after us to make certain our home here on Earth remains as livable and as beautiful as it can be—a responsibility that these days seems to carry higher stakes than ever before. Through this lens, I try to serve the world around me every day regardless of the difficulties or challenges that may exist.

I'll get off my soap box now—as you can probably tell I'm pretty passionate about this issue. But that's what I really wanted to talk about today—passion. In terms of the general notion of service, I know two things. First, I know I admire those who immerse themselves in service. They spend their evenings at soup kitchens feeding the homeless and their weekends in 10K fun runs raising money to combat disease. I know I deeply admire these people. The second thing I know, is that I'm not one of these people.

My family just bought an SUV—a fuel-efficient SUV, but an SUV nonetheless. Lord help me, I use non-recyclable paper towels sometimes. And I tend to think “fun run” is a bit of an oxymoron. But one thing I do have, that everyone has, that may get buried sometimes but is

never truly erased in the hubbub of our daily affairs, is passion. A great writer once defined love as the acknowledgment of pleasure. Personally, I think there's more to it than that, but once you know what you love, that passion that calls you to act or to serve, it becomes easier. Because it's not a labor anymore. It's a labor of love.

To take that a step further, I personally believe that because God created us as individuals, all with a unique perspective and unique gifts, then His universe is forever incomplete if we don't act on those things that give us passion. Something will forever be missing – both from ourselves and from the world.

And maybe that's why, when I'm working on something here or elsewhere to serve God's planet in some small way, I feel like some internal tank has been filled. I've let my passion out, and as part of that transaction, something enormously satisfying has come in.

Once you recognize that passion, it's just a matter of finding the pathway through which to manifest that passion. I feel blessed and fortunate to have found a marvelous pathway here at St. James.

The Baptismal Covenant

Thank you Trish, Nick, David and Scott – all striving to grow as disciples of Jesus through worship, spiritual formation, and service. And now, this morning, we have a baptism, in which Owen Richard Weakley will begin his journey as a disciple. His parents and godparents will undertake promises on his behalf to help him grow as a disciple of Jesus. And we all will also reaffirm our commitment to following Jesus as James did.