

**St. James' Day Sermon**  
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**Youth Director**  
**July 27, 2008**

Today we celebrate two things of great importance. We honor St. James, after whom our church was named, and (at the 10:30 service) we celebrate a baptism.

Tradition has it that St. James traveled into what is now northern Spain to preach the Gospel. Supposedly he is buried in the city of Santiago de Compostela in the area of Galicia in northwestern Spain.

For over a thousand years, Christians have been making a pilgrimage to visit the church built over his remains. Even John Adams, who went to Europe in 1779 seeking funds for the War of Independence, wished he had had time to make a visit. He wrote:

I have always regretted that we could not find time to make a Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. We were informed that the original of this shrine was this: A certain shepherd saw a bright light there in the night. Afterwards it was revealed to an Archbishop that St. James was buried there. This laid the foundation of a church, and they have built an altar on the spot where the shepherd saw the light.

Because scallops and their shells are so common in Galicia, it became customary to reward pilgrims who completed the journey to visit the tomb of St. James, with a scallop shell. Still today the scallop shell is associated with St. James and the shell also acts as a metaphor. The grooves in the shell, which come

together at a single point, represent the various routes pilgrims traveled, eventually arriving at a single destination.

Why go on a pilgrimage? The American Heritage Dictionary defines a pilgrimage as a long journey or search, especially one of exalted purpose or moral significance. One of the reasons pilgrims go seeking, is to strengthen their faith and draw closer to God. The hardship of the journey, the troubles encountered along the way, the doubts one must overcome, the support of fellow travelers, the kindness of strangers encountered at points passed through, and the success of reaching the destination all contribute to the building of faith experienced through a pilgrimage.

Faith building is the goal of the yearly workcamp trip for our youth. We have a youth representative here today to relate some of his experiences on last month's trip. I'm sure after hearing what he has to share, you will agree the trip qualifies as a type of pilgrimage.

**[Begin Michael's remarks.]**

My name is Michael Hart and I just returned from my second mission trip with St. James. The theme of this year's trip was "Love Out Loud". And loud I was! One of the highlights of this trip was spending the day at Cedar Point Amusement Park. I have never been a great fan of roller coasters --- I usually enjoyed more of the smaller rides. However, I soon learned that I didn't have

much say in the matter. I found everyone wanting to ride the roller coaster with me, just to hear me scream and yell and see my scared facial expressions. Yes, I did succumb to peer pressure and I rode some of the most outrageous rides over and over and over again. Each ride was more fun than the previous one. Soon, I looked forward to turning my stomach upside down and screaming as loud as I could.

As I look back on that experience, I realize that the youth group at St. James has helped me grow well beyond roller coasters. I have climbed tall ladders and painted houses in the heat of summer. I have repaired porch steps and rebuilt picket fences. I have slept in unair-conditioned schools and churches. I have shared quarters with loud, messy, smelly and snoring guys. I have ridden in a van for hours and hours without being able to stretch out my legs. I have competed in basketball and ultimate Frisbee games. I have met lots of new people---both young and old. All of these new experiences have been unsettling, like the roller coaster. But having the support of everyone involved in these mission trips has made it so much easier and more enjoyable.

These mission trips have helped me to become involved and achieve things I never thought I could. Even though I might not want to do some of the things I'm asked to do (like speaking today), I somehow find the courage and the motivation to do so. I do it because I know everyone is supporting me. I also realize that it is

good for me to stretch and try new things. Loving out loud means that I don't just talk about being involved and helping others----it means that I do it. And hopefully for me, it isn't just a once a year event.

This year's mission trip included kids from eleven different states. My work crew was a triple crew which meant there were 18 of us working together at one resident's house. Our resident was an elderly woman who had stage 5 cancer. She lived alone with her dog, Tallulah. Tallulah enjoyed running around and she was a nice distraction. We loved taking a break just to play with her. My crew's job was to scrape and paint the exterior of her house in addition to her garage and chicken coop. At first it seemed to be a pretty manageable job. But when Friday morning rolled around, we realized how much more we had left to do. We worked frantically and somehow, we were able to finish with only 5 minutes to spare.

Our resident was very appreciative and gracious. On Thursday, she surprised us with a lunch feast. She served pulled pork, potato salad, hot dogs, cookies, and 5 different pies. It tasted so much better than what the cafeteria was serving ---- I know she worked hard, maybe harder than us, to prepare all that food. It felt great to know that we were able to help such a wonderful and deserving person----that's what Loving Out Loud is all about!

**[End Michael's remarks.]**

Love out loud. What a great way to sum up the baptismal covenants we all agree to uphold. The workcamp trip easily covers 4 out of the 5 covenants. During the trip there is teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. The trip proclaims by example the Good News of God in Christ. The whole point of the trip is to serve Christ in all persons and workcampers are very careful to respect the dignity of the residents they assist. And I suppose if you are on a workcamp trip, you are probably persevering in resisting evil, so I'd say that gets the last one as well.

The covenants call us to be active Christians, wearing our faith not just in our hearts, but on the outside through our words and actions. In other words, love out loud. God rewards such a faith. As it says in today's reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings: "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you."

As Michael pointed out, living love out loud might not be easy to do and it can be hard to get started, but just like on a pilgrimage there are many to help along the way. As we are reminded in Matthew's gospel, small beginnings can turn into something big. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it

has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

From the smallest grain of a seed, comes a magnificent tree. So it is with us. From the smallest sparks of faith can come great lives of faith; all the shining examples of church leaders, the great preachers, those canonized as saints, the great men and women whose stories we read in the Bible, even St. James, began life as ordinary people—men and women without faith, going about their ordinary lives. But they were people transformed like a mustard seed from something small into something magnificent. That is why we take youth on workcamp trips; to kindle that spark. And that is my prayer for us today; that the small sparks within us become raging fires so that we are all enabled to love out loud—all the time!