

# The Importance of an Unimportant Little Boy

Sermon July 26, 2009

The Reverend Elton O. Smith, Jr.

St. James' Episcopal Church, Potomac, MD

Good Morning! It's great to see so many people here today. There's certainly one thing about us at St. James'—We do like our food! -- Coffee hours, lunches, picnics. I'm all for having more of them! But I think that today is more than just about food.

There's something special about this day— an outdoor picnic together celebrating St. James' Day, a baptism in a swimming pool—of twins. There's even something special about the gospel for the day.

Some days just stand out in our memories. This past week we celebrated the first astronaut walking on the moon 40 years ago. Most of us over 45 will remember Neil Armstrong landing on the moon and uttering the memorable words, "One small step for man—One giant leap for mankind."

It's not a big leap to connect that statement with what we are hearing this morning. A crowd of people has been following Jesus and was hungry—just like we are for our picnic today. No one knew how to feed the thousands of people until unexpectedly a small boy came out of the crowd and offered his small lunch—and changed history as Jesus not only fed the crowd but left twelve basketsful of bread from the fragments left over.

What makes this story so remarkable is that of all the stories and parables in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus—this is the only one repeated in all four Gospels—probably 80 years after Jesus' death—and the only one which includes how a little boy offering his lunch, opened the way for God's overflowing generosity to be shown in what Jesus did with that offering..

If you had been in that crowd , it's been a long day and you would be hungry too. Maybe like the little boy, you had your lunch, and no one else did, what would you do with it? would you hold onto it? This boy was able to let go and offer what he had, and to become a partner in God's generosity. The power of one to make a difference. The importance of an unimportant little boy. One small step by a little boy about whom we never will hear again—but a giant step forward for humanity to learn from Jesus that if

you hoard your life you will lose all that matters about it—if you spend what you have in his name, offer what you have in his honor, you will find a life worth eternalizing.

The power of one to make a difference Think of Rosa Parks who decided half a century ago NOT to go to the back of the bus, Think of the young man deciding twenty years ago to go out in front of the tanks in China's Tiananmen Square: small steps of offering, that changed history.

God can do surprising things with unexpected people. This morning we celebrate a saint named James, whose rambunctious impetuosity got him known with his brother John as "sons of thunder", and who survives in our memories despite his impulsive request to sit on Jesus' right hand in heaven. Thank God that he takes even one like that and makes something out of him!

And now we come to the baptism of two small babies, maybe a little more special because they are twins, and because they are going to be immersed in a swimming pool. They are just babies but they are entering into a community that we all share because of God's great generosity. We don't know much about them yet, other than having such great names—Eli and Jacob-- but we do know that "marked as Christ's own forever" what wonderful potential they have.

Because, you see, more is begun here for them than has ended. So as a congregation we will "receive them into the household of God" and invite them to "share with us in Christ's eternal priesthood". Like the boy with his lunch, like this saint named James, like all of us, who are saints of God by baptism, we may seem to be unimportant, but we're all important in God's eyes.

In grateful thanks for that recognition we soon will come to the altar with open hands and receive the bread of life. May God grant that we go from this altar today to offer up all that we have and all that we are, blessed and nourished with his presence! AMEN