

## **'The Mother of the Sons of Zebedee asked Jesus a favour' – St James Day, 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2021**

When you were children, did you have heroes, and who were they? Name one of them. Trevor Bailey. Can you remember your passionate relationship with your heroes? Do you still have them? We are watching a Netflix drama called 'Lupin'. Lupin is a thief, but he is the goody, and the police are the baddies. He's also really handsome and my wife is in love with him. He's a kind of superman and you know he is going to win in the end, so in all the tense bits I am really relaxed. He's a hero.

So, what is a saint, and what is the difference between a saint and a hero? Any takers?

Let's look at St James, today's saint. Jesus called him and his brother, John, the 'sons of thunder'. They once asked Jesus to pray to God to destroy with fire a village which had rejected his message. And, with the collusion of his mother, he wanted to be a hero, better than all the other disciples. He had delusions above his status, as in the secrecy of our hearts, many of us do. Have you never been hurt because you were not chosen? Who here can honestly say you have never been hurt because you were not chosen? I did not want to be a bishop, but at one time I would love to have been asked. And I could have said, 'no thank you', and my poor little ego would have been satisfied.

So, St James is a complete idiot. I do not think there is one reference in the gospels which contradicts that. Except that, extraordinarily, Jesus seems to have trusted him. When he wanted to do something really special, like appear on the Mount of Transfiguration, he leaves all the other disciples behind, and takes with him, Peter and James and John, the inner circle, one might call them. I wonder why Jesus trusted him. He was not trustworthy. With all the other disciples, at the crucial moment of Jesus' arrest, he ran for it. He failed the ultimate test with flying colours. Jesus' trusting James, was not something to do with James, it was something to do with Jesus, his ability to call out from us our goodness. This is massive, and if we can understand this, or if we can be visited by this experience, of the calling out of our inner, unknown goodness, we are going to do extraordinary things with our lives. I think we have already started on this journey.

There is only one other reference to James in the NT. By the way, this James did not write the Letter of James, that was Jesus' brother, who became the leader of the Jerusalem Church. Here it is. We have just heard it in Acts:

'At that time, King Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.'

I find the brevity of the report moving. There is no detail. But James had changed. He did not run away. He had grown up. What made him grow up? Not the advance of wisdom as the years went on. 'Do not talk to me of the wisdom of old men', said the poet, TS Eliot, 'but rather of their folly.'

He grew up, because, in the most traumatic circumstances, he was found out to be completely without substance, and with all the other disciples, he was forgiven and transformed in the middle of the mess, by Jesus, just as Peter and Paul were, the two pillars of the church. So, what is a saint? A saint is someone who has discovered that they are a

fool and a fraud. A saint is someone who is touched and called deep within, right in the midst of their foolishness. God loves them and believes in them. And the saint has said, 'yes, I'm coming, wait for me.' And then, for the rest of their lives, they set out on the arduous but joyful road, with and towards the one who is calling them.

A saint is what we are invited to be. Amen