6th Sunday after Trinity
2nd in a Series on the Twelve Apostles
Rolling Meadows - 1964

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Mark 3: 17 (RSV) James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, whom He surnamed Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder.

JAMES MAJOR

James Major - as he is sometimes called in order to distinguish him from the other James, called James, the Minor or Younger Less - was a fisherman with his brother John and his father Zebedee. They were partners together in what appears to have been a thriving and prosperous fish business. It is entirely possible that Peter and his brother, Andrew, were also in partnership with Zebedee and his two sons. We are told that all four of them ~~boys~~ became disciples of that stirring and forth-right ~~dynamic~~ preacher, John the Baptist. With his arresting personality and vivid proclamation of a Messiah whose coming would bring in the Kingdom of God, the Baptizer aroused the people as they had not been aroused for generations. Long had the people of Israel looked for the coming of One who would be their Savior, but never had the desire been more intense. The voice of the Baptizer, crying in the wilderness, announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand, stirred the masses, including James, to a fervor of expectancy.

Then came the day, never to be forgotten, when Jesus called James and his brother away from their nets to follow Him. I will make you fishers of men, He told them. Immediately, as the Scriptures report it, they left their father, their nets, and everything behind and followed Him. It may be that their father, Zebedee died soon after that, because the Bible does not speak of him again. Others have speculated that Jesus was the cause of a break-up in the family, that Zebedee was embittered when Jesus took his sons away from him and the business, that he then left his wife and children. Did Jesus have James and John in mind when he talked about giving up father and mother, house and home of His sake, and when He said, A man's foes are those of his own household? We don't know, but we do know that the mother of James and John, Salome, was a devout follower of Jesus. Mark tells us that when Jesus was in Galilee, Salome followed Him and ministered unto Him. She was among the women who followed Jesus to the Cross, who annointed His dead body with ~~precious~~ sweet spices, ~~who~~ and was ~~among~~ with the women who went to the tomb early Easter morning.

James is sometimes referred to as the Silent Apostle. There are only two sentences that might be attributed to James, although in both cases the words are said to have come from James and John together. In both cases it would have been better for the reputation of both men if they had not been spoken at all. In the first instance, James and John came to Jesus with the request, Let us sit at your right hand and your left hand, when You enter into Your glory. They wanted places of prominence in the Kingdom of Heaven. They wanted to be the first among the Twelve in the realms of glory. Jesus answered, You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? In other words, Can you suffer as I am going to suffer? You, who want so much of My glory, are you willing to share My Cross? Glibly they answered, We can! We are able. Jesus told them in effect, Believe me you will, and then He gave them a sermon on humility: Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many..... What about the Christian Church today? Is it not still plagued with petty quarrels and jealous arguments - pride and selfishness and vanity? These things have kept more people out of the Church and have driven more people away from Christ than many of the more spectacular sins. People expect the Church, and they have every right to expect it, to be a fellowship of Christian love. The 2nd recorded instance of James speaking was

When Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time - where He would suffer and die for the sins of the world! - He and His disciples passed through the land of Samaria. They came to a certain village and would have spent the night there; but when it became apparent to the people of the village that Jesus was not going to settle down and live with them, they would not welcome Him. Selfishly, they wanted Him for their own private Messiah - or they would not have Him at all. A fierce and terrible indignation kindled in the hearts of James and John. They came to Jesus and asked: Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did? Ever afterward, Jesus called them

sons of thunder. You don't know what you are saying, Jesus told them. I have com not to destroy men's lives, but to save them! And they went on to another village

It is something for us to remember too! God wants us to be angry, angry with a righteous wrath, against sin. He wants us to hate sin with a holy hatred. But He also wants us to love the sinner, even as He loves sinners, and gave His only Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. There is too much bad feeling today, even within the Christian Church. We don't like what people do or say and we begin to hate them for it. Dishonesty, hypocrisy, immorality, contempt and utter indifference for the things of God - these lead us to indignation, and we find ourselves saying, What's the use? Let them burn. If they don't want to go to heaven, let them go to... well, let them go! They're asking for it! A pastor will say to himself, I've done what I could. I've tried. I've prepared sermons to win people for Christ and save them from themselves and their own damnation. They don't come. They won't listen. They're not interested. They don't care! There are times, I must confess, when I have thought to myself that I would rather dig ditches than keep on trying to lift a congregation to the throne of God. When I put a spade into the ground, it will accomplish something. When I dig a hole, it will stay dug. So we share in the sin of James and His temperamental brother John: Lord, send fire from heaven and consume them! And the Lord answers, You don't know what you are saying. We are here to save men's lives, not to destroy them. And He means to tell us that we cannot ever give up.

In spite of everything we have said, James belonged to the Inner Circle within the Twelve - Peter, James, and John - whom Jesus often took with Him when He left the others behind. He was there in the bedroom, the death chamber of the daughter of Jairus, who was ruler of they synagog. He saw Jesus take the cold, pale fingers of the little girl in His own strong, warm hand, and heard Him say, with a Voice that even the dead must obey, Little girl, I say to you, Arise! Now James knew with a certainty the truth of Jesus' words: I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live!... If

anyone keeps My Word, he will never see death. James was there on the Holy Mount, where Jesus was transfigured before them - and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as light - and to the eyes of James there came a glimpse of heaven. James was there in the Garden of Gethsemane, and he saw his Savior drink the bitter cup of torment, saw Him baptized with the baptism of tears and blood, saw Him being led as a Lamb to the slaughter to die for the sins of all mankind.

James didn't know it then, but he was the first of the Twelve to lay down his life for the Christian faith. King Herod Agrippa was looking for someone of whom he could make a terrible example, and so abolish the Christian religion. James was chosen for execution, and even Peter was placed second on the list. It was James who first drank of the bitter cup and was baptized with the baptism of blood. His head was cut off with a Roman sword. The very fact that he was selected first for martyrdom indicates that he must have held a very prominent place in the early Church.

How many of us today are so full of our religion and so full of our love for Jesus that we would be willing to die for Him? At our confirmation we vowed ourselves willing to suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from Him. But we were pretty sure that no one in this day and age would kill us for being Christians. Yet, the world has a way of fighting the Church and our faith by sneering at it, making us ashamed to have a part in it. Suddenly we become unwilling to show our colors, embarrasssed to be known as disciples of Christ. We are carried away by what someone has called the easy-going paganism of modern life, which eats out the moral fiber and makes a man like a spiritual jellyfish.

Eusebius quotes Clement of Alexandria - 175 A.D. - as saying that a certain Josias brought the accusation against James which caused him to be beheaded by Herod. But when Josias saw the Apostle's conduct at his trial, he was deeply moved, fell down before him, and asked for forgiveness and acceptance into the Christian faith. James gave him the kiss of forgiveness with the words Pax vobiscum - Peace be with you. After the death of James, Josias paid the price of his

new faith with his own life. Thus, James - Son of Thunder - ended his life with a kiss of forgiveness and word of blessing on his lips. Do we share in his courag and his faithfulness? Amen.