



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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July 25, 2010

Sermon Text: [Acts 11:27-12:3a](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Kings 19:9-18](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 103](#)  
Second Lesson: [Acts 11:27-12:3a](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [Mark 10:35-45](#)

### St. James, the Elder Apostle

If you take some bread dough, roll it out in a circle and put some tomato sauce on it, some cheese, sausage, mushrooms, whatever, you pretty much recognize that is going to be the recipe for a pizza, right? Certain recipes you know and certain recipes you may find out the hard way that when you skip an ingredient it changes the recipe, it changes the product, or if you substitute in a recipe it changes the product. Just swap out some sugar and instead put in a cup of salt next time you are making cookies and see how you like them. Recipes are there so you can kind of get right in the ball park, right?

As we spend this day and this worship service commemorating St. James, the Elder Apostle, we kind of see God's recipe for quiet strength in a Christian. We don't hear a lot from James. There are only two statements in the Bible that can be attributed to him, and both of those are attributed to both James and John. We know a bit about him from the things we've seen, but in the midst of this quietness, we have to see that there is a remarkable strength in this man. And the recipe for that strength is what we want to focus on.

One of those statements that is attributed to James and John is what we just read in the Gospel, right? This is shortly before Jesus is going to suffer and die. As they are on their way to Jerusalem for the last time, James and John come with this request, "Lord, we'd like to sit at your right and your left in the kingdom, in your glory. We want to sit at the places of honor." Well, it's probably best if they wouldn't have said that, right? It didn't set too well with the other apostles. They didn't like that these guys thought they were better than they were. It's true that James and John had been privileged to see much of Jesus' ministry that some of the others didn't.

Peter, James and John were the inner three, right? They got to sit at the adult table while the rest of the disciples sometimes got pushed to the kiddy table for the meal. Like when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, the ten didn't get to go up on the mountain. Peter, James and John did. When Jesus performed some miracles, even raised the dead, Peter, James and John were in the room. The other ten were at the kiddy table out where the other people were, right?

So here is James, one of the guys that had seen some of the most incredible things that any human eyes have ever seen and yet, even after he believes that Jesus is the Savior, he's still a sinner, right? He sticks his foot in his mouth, him and John.

The other time we are told of when they stuck their foot in their mouths was shortly after the Transfiguration. As they were heading towards Jerusalem for that last time, they were traveling along and Jesus wanted to stay in the Samaritan village on his way to Jerusalem. So he sent some people on ahead into the village to make arrangements for them to stay some place that night. When the Samaritans found out it was some Jews on the way to Jerusalem, they didn't want anything to do with them. They said, "You ain't staying here. Go sleep on a rock. We don't want you here." So when that report came back, James and John, the guys known as the "Sons of Thunder," they said "Hey Jesus. You want us to call down fire from heaven and destroy this town?" They were ready to let them have it. Again, they would have been better off if they kept their mouths shut.

These guys saw these incredible things and yet, James, the Elder Apostle, one of the inner three, was still a sinner who desperately needed a Savior. He was still weak when he was looking at himself. He was still foolish. He still talked when he should have shut up. He still tried to move with power where God moves with love.

It's a good thing we aren't like that today, isn't it? It's a good thing we don't try to motivate each other with guilt, right? After the last voter's meeting as we were talking about how to fix some of our financial problems, someone came and told me that they were told what we need to do is start listing everyone's name again and what they give and then that will get them to give more. Do you want to motivate with the love of Christ or do you just want to kick people in the rear end and use the Law? That's kind of what God told James to shut up for, isn't it?

We have the power of the Gospel. Why are we going to try to use "Sons of Thunder" yet today? But we do that. We think we know better than God quite often. Think about it...it was about 10 years after Jesus' death and resurrection that Herod put James to death. He put him to death by the sword. That means he either cut his head off or he ran him through with the sword. More than likely he cut his head off, like his grandfather I believe it was did to John the Baptist.

Ten years...in a very real way you could think of Jesus' death and resurrection when he says, "I'm going to be gone. Now you guys go and spread the Word to the whole world." And he says to them, "Okay, you're on your own now. My visible presence is leaving you. I will be with you always to the end of the age, but you go and you make disciples, and you teach all nations. You do it. Go. You are the ones with the ball. Now you carry it." Ten years after that, one of the three that was in the inner circle that saw all these incredible things was now in the ground. Humanly speaking, does that make sense?

Wouldn't we say that's a life wasted? The closest thing to this today would be like a Confirmation where we say, "Okay, you've been strengthened to the point now where you can go and carry the ball on your own. We are not going to spoon feed you anymore. You are now old enough to be a responsible Christian communicant member of a congregation, so you go and use your gifts and you serve the Lord. You're on your

own though. We aren't going to spoon feed you anymore." It's kind of like the same thing. Ten years after you were confirmed, if the Lord would have called you to heaven, wouldn't those left behind say it was a life wasted, a life that wasn't lived to fullness because it was cut short too early? Humanly speaking, you and I would say, "God, you screwed up."

Why not Matthias, the "Johnny come lately" that was elected after Judas was gone? Why James? He was one of the inner three. That just doesn't make sense to us? We kind of think "God, you don't know what you're doing." And we say that a lot yet today. "God, you don't know what you're doing when you allow some difficulty into my life. God, you don't know what you're doing when you don't do things as fast as I want you to do them." If there's one thing we learn from James, the Elder Apostle, it's that God has called us to serve when we are here and where we are and not to wait for sometime later to get to know him better or to serve him more faithfully. God's recipe is to take sinners where they are and when they are and connect them to the Savior. You take a sinner and add the Savior, and that Savior is the one who strengthened James. That Savior is the one who had spoken to him in those parables and taught him over those three years and shown him those incredible things. He got to see Moses and Elijah face to face on that Mount of Transfiguration.

That Savior took away his sins. He didn't erase his name out of the Book of Life when he screwed up. He didn't kick him to the curb when he stuck his foot in his mouth these couple of times that we've heard about.

Thank God that God doesn't do that to us today when we screw up and we've got a better idea than God does, when we think we know better than God, or we'll telling God how he should be running his universe. It's a good thing God doesn't get out his whiteout and go to the Book of Life and get rid of our name.

He doesn't do that because God is a God of love and his recipe for quiet strength is that he adds his love and his Gospel and his forgiveness and his Spirit. He pours it out into our hearts, and his Spirit strengthens us so that we have the ability to do the things we don't think we could do. We see that in James.

Herod was not liked by the Jews. They did not want to accept him as king. He was an Idumean, and he wasn't a Jew, so when he decides, "You know what? I'm going to persecute these Christians that the Jews don't like; maybe that will get me some points with them;" you wonder why? Why does he choose James to put to death with the sword? All we ever read about in the Book of Acts is Peter being the one doing all the talking. Maybe James, another one from this inner circle, was the one that's like the thing that's the tallest that gets struck by the lightning first because he stood up the tallest and he was the strongest? We don't know that for sure. We aren't told that, but you have to wonder why run James through or cut off James' head? All we ever hear about is Peter.

Maybe it's because this recipe that the Lord had for quiet strength the Lord didn't see to it that it had to be recorded for us, but James lived his faith in such a way that when Herod was looking for a target to put down the Christians, his sight set on James. And it says volumes, doesn't it, about the strength of James' faith that he was willing to suffer anything, even death, in order to serve his Lord. That speaks more than any of his words ever would have. He loved his Savior, and he served his Savior.

Those of you that have been confirmed in the Lutheran faith, you have stood in front of God's altar here or some place else and have said, "I vow to suffer everything, even death, rather than fall away from God." Sometimes you have to kind of wonder if that isn't just too easy of a vow to make. What I mean is this; when is the last time you remember any Christian dying because they were a Christian? The days of James and Stephen earlier in the church, that was a reality. But I think Satan has gotten wiser over the almost 2,000 years since he put James to death with the sword. I think he saw the effect that this physical harm that he brought to the church at that time did. It drove them closer to Christ for strength to face what they could not deal with on their own.

So now I wonder if we wouldn't be better off changing the vow to "I vow to suffer anything, even life, rather than fall away from Christ." Sometimes it's the day-to-day life and the struggles and the difficulties and the questioning of God that drives a wedge between us and God, not the threat of imminent death of a sword hanging over our head. We don't even see that really as a reality. But the Lord being the Lord of every aspect of my life, not just the ones I want him to be? I vow to let him be that and live my whole life for him, not just the parts I want to be...that might be a little more frightening for us. That might make us stop and think a little more.

Then we would need some kind of strength that's beyond our own. To let the Lord be the Lord of every aspect of our lives, not just the life preserver we go to in prayer when things are going to hell in a handbasket as our last resort, "I might as well talk to God." Instead, making him a real priority, not just lip service priority where God's Word is the priority in life and yet we don't get to Bible class, or we don't read the Bible every day.

Priorities in life...I don't have to tell you that wearing pants is a priority in my life, do I? You see I'm wearing them every day. It kind of shows you that's a priority. Telling me that God's Word is a priority in my life and yet never being in a Bible class, that's kind of like not wearing pants, isn't it? Yet as Christians, all too often that's where we are.

So you want the recipe for quiet strength? Rely on Christ, not yourself. Get closer to Christ, not yourself. Get closer to him and his Word and his Sacraments and let that be the strength that enables you to face life, for his sake.