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Chapel Address

For St. James The Elder The Apostle's Day

RAY MARTENS

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom He predestined he also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified." Romans 8:28-30.

THE hymn¹ with which we opened our worship is a hymn of consecration in the best sense. It does not attempt to list ways in which we intend to favor God with our service; instead it acknowledges that God has favored us abundantly and expresses the confidence that God will continue to draw us to Him in faith and service. It says not, "Come what may, we shall be faithful," but "Come what may, He will be faithful." Now, we make a point of this because it fits what is properly the central theme of our worship this day. Today is the day set aside by the Church to honor the memory of and to be encouraged by the service of St. James, the elder, Apostle and martyr. James, the brother of John, illustrates so well what is true of every man but more apparent in some than in others, namely, that a man's effectiveness in kingdom work is not due so much to what he brings to the job but rather to this that God brings the job to him and equips him to do it. His life story as we have it is an example of God's way of making good men for the good of His kingdom.

Our text, a part of the Epistle for this day, states that the man of God is reached by the grace of God throughout the whole span of his life, and well beyond that to that time before the world in which only God was and until after the world when God and His faithful will always live together in heaven. It is proper to say then that from eternity to eternity God touches us with His grace. This is a very individual reaching for and holding a man that God accomplishes; for God knew and chose each of us long before even our first parents existed. In His purpose and planning He first selected and then enacted every course of action that would lead to our being His own. This is the history of God's grace; it is the Gospel message which climaxes in the fulness of time in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God who had shared in the intent and work of the Father from eternity. Through the accom-

¹"From God Shall Naught Divide Me" (TLH 393).

plishments of the Son of God and through the proclamation of what God has worked for us through Him we have been brought to faith and in the power of this same Gospel have been changed to conform to Christ. That is, we in our lifetimes have heard God declare us righteous by ascribing to us the righteousness of Christ. Thus it is our assured hope that God's goodness to us will continue right back into the dimension of eternity, where we may fully expect that glory without distraction awaits us. There you have the full scope of God's loving concern for us; there you see what it means that in everything God works for good with those who love Him. And what is very clear is that if this is the way that God establishes and extends His rule, then we bring no contribution to the whole cause other than what God has given us to bring. We were just born, we were just going about our business, when God touched us with the grace that extends from eternity to eternity and made us good men for the good of His kingdom.

It seems to me that the experience of St. James along with what God accomplished through him has many points of contact with our own situation. James was neither a welfare case nor a nobleman. He was in the fishing business with his father and brother. He had learned to know from his parents and rabbis of the blessings of God upon his people and of God's promises of the Deliverer to come. Then one day while he was patching nets, the boundless grace of God which had been aimed in his direction from eternity touched him when Jesus called him to follow. He and his brother left the business and followed. After hearing some of the message of Jesus and seeing some of His mighty acts, he was specifically called to be an Apostle, first a trainee and then an emissary. In this favored position he had the advantage of being present as Jesus talked and worked, and as one of the central three was in on some otherwise very private affairs. As one of the twelve, James also bears his share of the guilt that attaches to them collectively for their lack of faith on occasion, their slowness to understand, their quickness to run away. More specifically, James along with his brother and mother gained a kind of infamy with his attempt to secure a seat of honor in the kingdom to come. So his training days and field work excursions were marked with ups and downs. But he with the other disciples had the benefit of Pentecost, and worked faithfully, although not as the center of attraction, until his untimely death at the hands of Herod Agrippa I a short twelve years after Pentecost. The glories of heaven are his. God gave James the equipment so that he could be used not dramatically but effectively as one of the good men for the good of His kingdom.

Quite frankly, James is my kind of man and I think that you should feel a great deal of affinity for him too. As far as we know his life, he was neither a hero nor a villain, neither a scholar nor a simpleton, neither rich nor poor, neither a leader nor a servant. Under God's blessing he was not superior to but adequate for that

task which God gave him to do. He was good old average James, that is, as average as we can think of an apostle as being. All in all he demonstrates not what a man can do when he chooses to go to work for God, but what God can do when he chooses a man and stands with him in faithfulness and blessing. He is the kind of man whose memory serves to assure and encourage us as we go about our work. This is what the hymn-writer is talking about when he says:

Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?
"Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer yes."