

**James – Leader in the Jerusalem Church.**

Welcome to our service today. Let's reflect on these words as our **call to worship**, where James in his letter says; "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10)

The writer of Proverbs tell us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

William Bullock, a Missionary of the S. P. G. for 32 years, and sometime Dean of Halifax, Nova Scotia was also a hymn writer and known to hymnody principally through his popular hymn "*We love the place, O God*" written in 1854. It is set to the tune *QUAM DILECTA* composed in 1861 by Henry Lascelles Jenner who was once Bishop of Dunedin. We know and find the hymn from Church Hymnary 3, at number 15. Take a few moments to read and reflect on the words as you prepare to worship God today.

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| 1 We love the place, O God,<br>wherein thine honour dwells;<br>the joy of thine abode<br>all earthly joy excels.          | 3 We love the word of life,<br>the word that tells of peace,<br>of comfort in the strife,<br>and joys that never cease. |
| 2 We love the house of prayer,<br>wherein thy servants meet;<br>and thou, O Lord, art there<br>thy chosen flock to greet. | 4 We love to sing below<br>for mercies freely given;<br>but O we long to know<br>the triumph-song of heaven.            |
| 5 Lord Jesus, give us grace<br>on earth to love thee more,<br>in heaven to see thy face,<br>and with thy saints adore.    |   |



Join now in this **prayer of approach and confession**;

In this dwelling place O God, we prepare a space, as our hearts search for rest, may they find a home at the heart of Jesus. As regular worshipper, stranger and friend, we long to be welcome and assured of belonging. In the praises we offer to you our Maker and Sustainer, may we know we are blessed with strength for each day; for you Creator God keep your promises of love and faithfulness, ever present in the forming of the day. As the story of life unfolds in morning glow, you retell the moments of how the world began. In the midday meal, the provision of manna to meet our basic needs becomes the words upon our lips and in our bellies. As sunset beckons us to sleep, the darkness of the night can awaken our fears of endings and betrayals, and yet your presence with us assures us of a new day of resurrection.

Compassionate God, who dwells in the highest places and yet walks in midst of all human life, look upon us and all our faults and failings with tenderness and hope. Turn your eyes towards the places that we would hope to have you remain, and begin the work of reclaiming the barren and infertile landscape of our human frame. Listen to our sorrow as we remember how we have failed in our relationships with others, the world and you.

In the retelling of how you wait and watch with your creation, the promises you have made are revealed and fulfilled. So we worship you, the Maker, our Sustainer, and the One in whom and by

whom we are fulfilled. Hear us as we seek to be restored to live Christ's story in our action for this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen



Our **Scripture Reading** for today is taken from the letter to the Galatians 2:1-10 and read from the new living translation

Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing. And they supported me and did not even demand that my companion Titus be circumcised, though he was a Gentile.

Even that question came up only because of some so-called believers there - false ones, really - who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you.

And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favourites.) Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles.

In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews. Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.



### **James – Jerusalem Church Leader.**

Last Sunday, we reflected upon the life of James, brother of Jesus, a man who lived in Jesus company for 33 years but never believe on Jesus until after Jesus' resurrection. We know this fact because the apostle Paul made mention in his letter to the Corinthian Church, (1 Corinthians 15:7) when he wrote; "Christ died for our sins, ...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, ... he appeared to James, then to all the apostles". Jesus was seen by James and we're told he believed. I think that this stuck a cord with Paul as the two men both had encounters with Jesus after his resurrection which resulted in them becoming believers and so too, great apostles of Christ.

If we want to follow a chronological account of James' new life, then the next time we hear of James, is again from Paul. It is now three years on from Paul's conversion, during which time the progress of James has led him to rise and become one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church. What we learn is that James' high character and his close relationship to Jesus Christ, along with his conservative tone of mind have all combined to give James a unique position of influence and authority in the Jerusalem Church.

We know this from at least five events recorded in the New Testament. The first I have just mentioned is that of Paul's visit to Jerusalem, three years after his conversion. You may recall when we reflected on Saul's life, how immediately after his conversion, he went to Arabia and that in our reading last Sunday we heard Paul say that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and he then adds that he didn't

see any of the other apostles except for James the Lord's brother. (Galatians, 1:18ff) The mention of James in the same breath with Peter, indicates the eminence and authority of James within the Jerusalem church.

The second mention of James is found in the account in Acts 12:17. Again recalling the life of John Mark, we learnt of his mother Mary, and how the night that Peter escaped from jail many were gathered in her house, praying for Peter and these believers were astonished when Peter appeared and told them of his of his miraculous release. Before fleeing to a safer environment, Peter gave this request that they go and tell these things to James and the brothers, which means the members of the Jerusalem Church. The singling out of James implies that by this time, James had become an authority in the Jerusalem Church.

A third event is recorded by Paul, when 14 years later he again went up to Jerusalem, as we heard from our reading today from Galatians 2:1-10. On this visit the leaders of the Jerusalem church confirmed that Paul preached the true Gospel and gave him the right hand of fellowship, showing unity of message and mission. Paul speaks here of those who were the pillars of the church; James, Peter and John.

In Acts 15:2-21 we read of a fourth event when a party of Christians in Jerusalem, formerly Pharisees, couldn't accept the admission of Gentiles without circumcision into the church. This reactionary party may have thought James was on their side. It is known that wherever they travelled, like to Antioch, they were divisive and Paul and Barnabas determined to get this matter settled once and for all. As representatives of the church of Antioch, they came to Jerusalem, recognised as the administrative centre, to engage in a public congress. Peter spoke first, championing the view of Paul and Barnabas, recounting his own experience at Caesarea where the Gentile household of Cornelius received salvation without submitting to circumcision. Barnabas and Paul related their experiences among the Gentiles on their first missionary journey. After hearing all sides, it is James who gives a decision and if the Judaizers were counting on James, they were sadly disillusioned because he backed up Peter with an old prophecy from the Book of Amos which foretold that the Gentiles would seek after the Lord. James advised the council to publish a letter declaring that circumcision was not obligatory for Gentile converts, but that they should keep certain Old Testament rules. These rules included abstaining "from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood." While James was opposed to placing the yoke of Jewish ceremonialism on the necks of Gentile believers, he was not excusing them from obedience to the great moral commands. It was James who rendered the final verdict and his authority seemed to supersede even Peter's authority thus portraying him as an eminent authority in the Jerusalem church.

The fifth event comes from Acts 21:17 when Paul reports to James after his third missionary journey. Bearing an offering from the churches of Greece to the needy, Paul arrived in Jerusalem and was received gladly by the believers. The next day Paul pays a visit to James. All the elders of the church are assembled, probably at James' house, to pay their respects to Paul and to hear him declare "what things God has wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. Since no apostles were mentioned, it is likely they were all away, fulfilling their mission of preaching the Gospel to other parts of the world. James was in charge. James and the elders had heard a rumour which had been widely circulated reporting that Paul taught Jewish Christians not to observe the customs of Moses. Though a lie, many believed it. To allay the false report, the suggestion was for Paul to associate with four men in the temple who, though Christians, were fulfilling the obligations of a Nazarite vow. He was to assume himself the charges of their vow. The object of the suggestion was to prove to the Jerusalem church that the Judaizers falsified Paul's attitude towards Jewish believers.

These five considerations would give to us a clear demonstrate that James had a leadership position in the Jerusalem church. If not, would it not have been one of the apostles who would have been better fitted because of their three years training in Jesus' company.

Although James may have been nearly 30 years in Jesus' presence as his brother and although he did not accept Jesus' claims until after Jesus' resurrection, this had not kept him from observing Jesus and listening to His words. Unknown to James, Jesus was indirectly preparing him for this great task ahead. So not only was James suited as the chief elder of the Jerusalem church because of his association with Jesus, but also because of his character. Tradition says that after the Ascension Peter, James the apostle, and John selected James the Just, the Lord's brother to be the first Bishop of Jerusalem. With the apostles increasingly absent from the Holy City, James came to hold the chief position of leadership in the church.

As we have already learnt, although an unbeliever in Jesus before Jesus' death, James would have heard Jesus' teachings and would have imbibed many of Jesus' sayings. The book of James is attributed to James brother of Jesus and shows how deeply steeped James was in his Jesus' teachings, Not only in content but in phraseology. Scholars have found at least ten parallels to the Sermon on the Mount in his short epistle. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, James was remarkably faithful to his memory of Jesus teaching. We can't help wondering if some of James' words of wisdom may possibly be some unrecorded utterances of our Lord Jesus Christ.

James focuses on practical Christian morality. He wants people to be doers of the Word, not hearers only. His main emphasis is placed on holy living. James didn't want Jerusalem saints or any other professing Christians to sit in pews on Sunday mornings mindlessly chanting their hymns or creeds like the parrot who was taught to say, "I love Jesus." So for this reason James stressed works and because of this emphasis Martin Luther, the great reformer, champion of faith, called James' letter an epistle of straw. No real conflict exists between faith and works. In Paul's teaching we see how he deals with the root of salvation which is faith, while James handles the fruit of faith, which is works. The works Paul rejects are those which precede salvation and are thus dead. The faith James denounces is one which does not produce good works. Of course, James knows that salvation comes through faith, and not apart from works. Thus Paul and James do not conflict. They do not stand face to face beating each other, but back to back beating off common foes.

James was a doer of the Word, practising what he preached in his epistle. He exemplified his teaching on humility, magnifying Jesus as the Lord of Glory and minimized his own relationship. (James 4:6-10) He exemplified his teaching on the tongue, by exercising control of his own tongue. (James 1:19, 26, 3:1-12) He exemplified his teaching on caring for the poor, the widows, the orphans and the down-trodden, shown in the church at Jerusalem's sympathy towards its needy in alms giving. (James 1:27, 2:1-9, 5:1-8) He exemplified his teaching on wisdom. His epistle is the chief wisdom book of the New Testament. (James 3:13-18) and he exemplified his teaching on prayer. Tradition says James was a man of prayer, "his knees became as hard like a camel's because he was always kneeling in the Temple, asking for forgiveness for the people. (James 1:5-6; 4:3; 5:14-18) James was indeed a godly man, reflecting true likeness to Jesus Christ. He died a martyr around 62-63 A.D. and tradition suggesting that James refused to persuade people to abandon the doctrine of Christ, but rather urged to the contrary, to tell the story of Jesus and his love for all people. James became a true apostle for Jesus.

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Join with this prayer:

God of grace, You did not make us to be the toys of creation, but instead invited us to play our part as stewards of the world. That invitation has been offered to each generation and people who have sought to live in relationship with you, and You ask us to share in prayer and care, for the hopes and fears we hold in our hearts.

God of wisdom, for your church, in all its diversity, we pray, that we might be one body, recognising the gifts of all our members; that we might find unity, in the shared questions of interpretation; that we

might forgive and be forgiven, as we learn and grow together; for within our faith communities there are times when we struggle with each other and within ourselves. We pray for the shared life of our community that we might share the sorrows and pains of faith as well as the celebrations for each individual who forms our community that they might find the presence of Christ draw near at those times when discipleship weighs like a burden.

In our unsettled world angry voices of division rise rapidly and it is not always obvious or clear that nations are willing or prepared to speak to each other or to find paths to peace. We pray for our own government as it continues to face the challenges of a changing world for world leaders across the world searching for a common language and a willingness to learn from each other.

God of compassion, for all who need to know your care, we pray. Where the events and struggles of life pose difficult questions; where the loss of life, health or job bring pain; where abuse or addiction leave people feeling powerless; we pray that we would all know your presence and your healing and liberating touch.

As we look at the towns in which we live it is not difficult to notice the needs of those who live around us. We pray for those who are homeless, as they hope to find secure and safe accommodation to call home. For those who are lonely, not knowing when a friendly voice will reach into their lives and break the silence of their day for those who are hungry awaiting a meal that will end their cravings. We open our hearts to your world and all its people in silence, bringing our particular concerns and dreams, and ready to be transformed in our thoughts and our actions.

As our prayers are never at an end may we recall the prayers and lives of those who have made the faithful journey and now take their final rest in the dwelling place of your heart. May their demonstrations of Christ's love in their lives stories inspire us to allow your Holy Spirit to lead us bravely to new opportunities to be your people.

God, hear these and all our prayers, through Jesus, who taught us how to prayer in the words;

Our Father ... Amen.

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As our worship draws to a close today let me share with you this little story about a well loved hymn about the Church. It is an interesting story about the hymns origin. In the mid-nineteenth century, Bishop John William Colenso of Natal raised a ruckus in the Catholic Church when he challenged the historicity and authority of many of the Old Testament books. Bishop Gray of Cape Town wrote a stirring response of defence, which, in 1866, inspired Samuel Stone, to write this beloved hymn, basing his text on Article 9 of the Apostle's Creed: "The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church; the Communion of Saints; He is the Head of this Body." Samuel Stone was a clergyman of the Church of England, the son of Rev. William Stone and he was born at Whitmore, Staffordshire, April 1839. He succeeded his father at St. Paul's, Haggerstown, in 1874. The tune was composed by Samuel S. Wesley – called AURELIA which means "golden".

As an affirmation of Christ as the foundation of our faith, and all who have gone before us and with Christians around the world, declaring that beyond any theological differences, cultural divides, and variances in practice, we are all part of the same body, the body of Christ. "The Churches one foundation" is a hymn we find in the Church Hymnary 4 at number 739 – but it is also has a few extra verses often found in other hymnals. We close today by thinking on these words.

1 The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;  
she is his new creation  
by water and the Word:  
from heav'n he came and sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her,  
and for her life he died.

2 Elect from ev'ry nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation  
one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
one holy name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with ev'ry grace endued.

3 Though with a scornful wonder  
men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping,  
their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song.

4 The church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord to defend,  
to guide, sustain, and cherish,  
is with her to the end;  
though there be those that hate her,  
and false sons in her pale,  
against both foe and traitor  
she ever shall prevail.

5 'Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation  
of peace forevermore;  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious  
shall be the church at rest.

6 Yet she on earth hath union  
with the God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won:  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.

**The Benediction Blessing** – taken from Numbers 6:24-26  
known as the Aaronic Blessing.

May the Lord bless you and guard you;  
may the Lord make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
may the Lord look kindly on you  
and give you peace. Amen.

