Lent Midweek 3

March 18, 2020 Acts 12

Series A

The killing of James the Son of Zebedee

Much has happened in the life of the early Church since we last met. Saul has converted to Christianity. He is now a zealous and fervent defender of the faith. Whose name has been changed to Paul, the Apostle. Peter has denied Christ three times and been restored to the faith by Jesus after Jesus' resurrection. The persecution of Christianity had become a significant problem for the early life of the Church. World governments are now actively involved in the punishing and killing of Jesus' disciples. The abuse of power and neglect for one's neighbor is becoming an epidemic in the Roman world.

Jesus has told Paul that he must suffer much for the faith. Peter has begun to rise in fame in the faith and amongst the people of God in a variety of places. He is even known to the Roman government for his actions in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus named Peter as his earthly spiritual supervisor of the Church, The Catholics call Peter the first Pope and rightly so.

In fact, in tonight's reading from Acts Chapter 12, there is a subtle detail that we will come back to in a moment or two. However, the predominant story of Acts 12 is Peter's escape from prison with the help of the Angel of the Lord.

Herod has imprisoned Peter with the intent to kill him after the Passover, as noted in verse four of the chapter. Herod has already killed James as indicated in verse two of this chapter, a detail we will come back to a bit later.

There are three separate men named James in the New Testament. All of them have at least some involvement in the Jerusalem Church. First, there is James the Great, or big Jim, the brother of John the beloved disciple and author of the Gospel of John. These two are known as the Sons of Thunder. Then there is James the Lesser because he was of smaller physical stature than big Jim, not less important. James the Less is the son of Alpheus and Mary. James the Less is the brother of St. Matthew, the Gospel writer. Finally, there is James the Just or James the Righteous, who is believed to be the half-brother of Jesus. He is a figure of towering importance and exerted nearly as much authority as Peter. James the Righteous is also the author of the Epistle of James. He is known to have been the bishop of the Jerusalem Church for more than 30 years. James also interacted with Peter and Paul frequently.

Tonight, we will deal with the first James. Big Jim, James the Great. He is the most famous of the three James. In part because of his association with his brother John. The second portion of his notoriety is his post-humous tradition as being the Patron Saint of Spain. As stated earlier, he is the brother of John. These men were sons of Zebedee and fishing partners with Peter. Together, Peter, James, and John are the inner circle of Jesus 12 Apostles. It is likely that along with Peter, James and John were natives of Bethsaida. These three were with Jesus on three separate and miraculous occasions. The raising of Jairus, daughter from the dead. Jairus was the president of the synagogue, likely Capernaum. The Mount of Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane.

 Their mother Salome is said to be the Virgin Mary's sister, which is in the Gospels. This makes them first cousins of Jesus, along with John the Baptist. Some also hold that the sons of Thunder, like their parents, were disciples of John the Baptist. Salome, the mother of James and John, was a part of a large circle of women who worked behind the scenes to support the growing ministry of Jesus financially.

James, the brother of John, is mentioned throughout the gospels. He is present on the day of Pentecost. On which several thousand people come to faith. Then nothing is recorded about him for nearly a decade. This one line in Acts 12 is the last mention of him, and it occurs in Jerusalem a decade after Pentecost. It is also the fuel for pleasing the crowd that Herod uses to develop further his plans to execute Peter.

At some point, James the Great obtained Roman citizenship while this may not seem like a big deal it becomes one. If for no other reason than the style of execution, the Roman government uses for its citizens versus non-citizens. It's the difference between lethal injection and electrocution in our time. One is far more humane than the other. In Acts 12:2, Luke writes that James was put to death with the sword. He was beheaded as a Roman citizen, quick and clean in comparison to the prolonged suffering of crucifixion, which was done to Jesus and others who were not- Roman citizens, including Peter.

 So tonight, the questions Jesus poses before you, are these. What have you done, or are you now doing to facilitate the spreading of the gospel? Have you led, or are you currently conducting Bible studies in your homes? Are you participating in any bible studies? Are you assisting in the care of the sick and the shut-ins in your respective neighborhoods? Are you spending much time in prayer in support of your Church, your elders, council, pastor, and your Synodical Officials? If you answered no to any or all of these then, Jesus asks you to come to him in repentance turn from these sins. Then ask Jesus to show you what you can do to support the mission of His Church both globally and here. We will take a few moments for silent reflection, individual confession, and engage in corporate confession and absolution. Amen. (Go to the rail for silent reflection.