

Alleluia. Christ is Risen! *He is Risen indeed. Alleluia.*

The two Apostles that we commemorate today, St Philip and St James, are not as easily remembered as their comrades Peter the Rock, John the Beloved, Thomas the twin, or even Judas the betrayer. Philip and James fall into that middle part of the list of the Twelve where name changes make it hard to keep things straight. And it doesn't help that James isn't the only one in the Bible – or even among the Apostles – to be called James. There's also the James from the book of Acts, the son of Clopas. Then there's James the brother of Jesus, Bishop of Jerusalem and the likely author of the Epistle that bears his name. And, most notably, there's James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, also an Apostle, and a member of Jesus' inner three. That James, the Son of Zebedee, is often called “James the Greater” in an effort to distinguish him from our James, unfortunately dubbed, “James the Lessor.”

And while James “the Greater” makes multiple appearances in the New Testament, all that the Scriptures tell us about our James – James “the Lessor” – is his name, his father's name, which is Alphaeus, and that he was one of the Twelve disciples whom Christ called as an Apostle. In other words, the Scriptures make it clear that our James was not important by virtue of himself, but by virtue of his office. Yes, his individual life might have been well-known by his family, friends, and parishioners, but as far as history is concerned, he has no personal accomplishments or achievements for which we or the world would remember him. As far as we know, James “the Lessor” was simply a pastor who quietly went about his work of baptizing, absolving, teaching, and administering the Sacrament.

Similar things can be said about St. Philip – though we do know a little bit more about him than James. Philip was from Bethsaida, which happens to be the same fishing village as Peter and Andrew. In John's gospel he makes a couple of appearances. First there is the time when, after being called as an Apostle, Philip carried out his office by seeking Nathaniel and making the

confession, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son Joseph.” Then later, during holy week, Philip also brought a group of Greeks to Christ after hearing their request, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” This was evangelism in the simplest but most profound way. Bring people to Jesus, which really means, bring them to church... So, like James, Philip simply went about doing the work that God had given him – not in some extravagant or glamorous way, but through the humble office to which our Lord called him.

But despite his times of faithful service, like all of us, Philip also had some less than positive moments. In our Gospel reading for today when Jesus said those comforting words about being the way, the truth, and the life, Philip was discontent. He wanted more, and so, he said: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” To this Jesus responded with the gentle rebuke, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Luther liked to use this interaction between Jesus and Philip to illustrate what he called the “theology of glory” – the idea that we sinners don’t like how God uses humble means to accomplish His good will among us. Instead we want things directly. We want things that are openly powerful and impressive. As we struggle with sickness or strained relationships, or whatever it is, we often want God to do things differently – to intervene in such a “special” and “unique” way so that there would be no doubt about His mercy and grace.

But Jesus reminds us, as He did Philip, that to know Him is enough. To know the crucified Son who comes to us in His Word and Sacraments is enough to face all the realities of this lost and dying world. Because there, in those humble means, Christ promises us the sure and certain hope of forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death, and a place in heaven. And that is enough to get us through whatever doubts, fears, conflicts, sins, and struggles that our flesh or the devil would attack us with.

Really, today's lesson is a simple one: God uses humble means. He used the death of His Son on the cross to win life for the world. He uses everyday things like words, water, bread and wine, to deliver that life to the world. And He uses sinners and nobody's to build up His Church in the world.

So, even though the kids playing Apostle probably wouldn't dress up as St Philip or St James – it is for that reason that these men are actually some of the best saints for us to commemorate. Because like Philip and James most of us will never really amount to anything that the world calls special. While we're living our accomplishments will be set next to our faults. And when we die, there probably won't be any buildings named after us or awards given in our honor. Our emails, text messages and sermons won't be preserved in museums and there will be little, if anything, for the world to remember us by.

But though insignificant before men, like Philip and James, we are significant before God in heaven. And like Philip and James, we are remembered not because of who we are and what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us and to us. We are remembered for what He has done and continues to do through His humble means of grace. We are known and valued by the blood of Jesus Christ – by the blood that washed us clean in Baptism – by the blood that grants us peace here in the Supper – and by the blood that has purchased us a room in the Father's house, where we sinners, along with forgotten Apostles, find rest for our souls.

In Christ, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with all the saints and members of the household of God. We might not be known by the world, but the Father knows us and we know the Father. And that is enough. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.