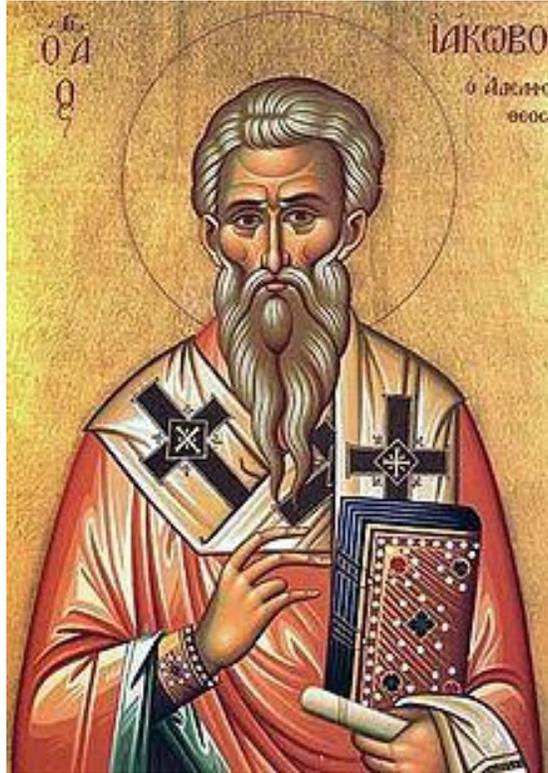


JAMES AND MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS



1 Corinthians 15:3 "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (that is, Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. . ."

This is the fifth of a seven-part sermon series that I have been preaching all this Easter Season entitled "The Witnesses to the Resurrection," a rare chance to consider all these stories in a single year. Last week, we looked at the less familiar story of the Beloved Disciple and the Empty Tomb. Two weeks ago, it was the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Three weeks ago it was the popular tale of the Doubting Thomas. On Easter Sunday morning we examined the celebrated narratives of the women at the sepulcher. Today we look at one of the least known stories about the Resurrection, one rarely remembered, and one that is seldom talked about if at all, and yet one which is quite remarkable in itself. And then I wish to speculate about another appearance that is not specifically mentioned or recorded anywhere, but which may be reasonably implied by the Scriptures.

First, the appearance to James, the brother of Jesus; who is surprisingly listed by Paul among those to whom the Resurrected Jesus appeared. However, be aware that we do not possess an actual account of this Resurrection Appearance to James. Like the appearance to Peter or the one to the five hundred brethren, both of which we will talk about next week, we only have here the mention that the Risen Jesus appeared to James. James' name simply occurs in Paul's long list of witnesses, that is it. No one else mentions this appearance, and no further details are known, but it remains incredibly significant, for reasons I will explain in a minute.

At the outset, we must clarify that this appearance is to James, the brother of Jesus, sometimes called James the Just. This is NOT James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, one of the twelve Apostles. Nor is this James, the son of Alphaeus, another of the twelve Apostles, sometimes called James the Less (Mk. 15.14, 16.1, Mt. 27.56). This reference in Paul's list is clearly to James, the brother of Jesus.

And this James, along with Simon Peter, both became acknowledged leaders of the early church in Jerusalem, as witnessed in today's reading from Acts about the Jerusalem Council, and also in Paul's account of that same meeting in his letter to the Galatians (Gal. 1.19). At the conclusion of that Council, it is James, the brother of Jesus, who stands up and announces his decision (Acts 15.13). He seems to be in charge there among the apostles and elders gathered there, a company which included St. Peter. So James has traditionally been understood in the Church as the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

But unlike Peter, whose role as an important disciple of Jesus is well documented throughout the four Gospels, James, Jesus' brother, played absolutely no active role that we know of in the three years of Jesus' public ministry; James was apparently NOT one of the followers of his brother during his lifetime, so it is somewhat surprising to see him heading the important church in Jerusalem later. In fact, the Fourth Gospel quite explicitly records there that Jesus' brothers did not

believe in him (Jn. 7.5) and they even goaded him a bit about his pretensions.

At the beginning of the seventh chapter of the Gospel which is called John's, it reads: "After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. So (Jesus') brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing . . . (For not even his brothers believed in him)," it continues. "Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come. . . I am not going to this festival' . . . After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then (Jesus) also went, not publicly but as it were in secret" (Jn. 7:1-10). Clearly there was some tension here between Jesus and his brothers, who did not believe in him.

Similarly Jesus' relationship to his mother, Mary, was apparently not much better than that with his brothers, despite our later veneration of her as the Ever-Blessed Virgin Mother. Mary, too, was seemingly not an active participant in Jesus' ministry, for she is mentioned hardly at all in the recorded narratives of the Gospels. And in fact, the few glimpses we get of her between the birth and death of her son suggest that Mary, like James, did not understand or did not approve of Jesus' activities, and that their relationship was a bit estranged.

Despite the stained-glass mentality later adopted in the Church about Mary, in each of the three recorded stories of the New Testament between Jesus' birth and death, there is obvious friction between the two of them, between Jesus and his mother.

The first of these stories is the account of Jesus being accidentally left behind in the Jerusalem by his family when he was twelve years old, the only recorded incident of Jesus' youth. When after three days of frantically searching for the lost child, Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the Temple, they were astonished, and his mother, with an obvious touch of frustration, exclaimed, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." Scripture then records that that his parents did not understand Jesus' reply about being in his Father's house, but that Jesus did go down with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them thereafter (Lk. 2.41-51).

The Fourth Gospel also records friction between Jesus and his mother when she is next mentioned, when they appear together at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus performed his first miracle. You remember the story. "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'" (Jn. 2.3). We don't know Mary's tone of voice here; we don't know how she said this and what she meant by it exactly, but it is clear that Jesus appears annoyed by the comment, responding to her "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn. 2.1-12),

although he is again obedient to her wishes. Oddly though, Jesus is always recorded as addressing his mother by the rather unflattering title of "woman," and never is known to have referred to her by any more affectionate name, though he repeatedly called his Father in heaven, "Abba," the intimate and touching Aramaic word used by children for their father, sometimes translated as "Daddy" or "Papa." But for his mother, Mary, it was always only 'woman.'

Mark's Gospel (Mk. 3.21, 31-33) notes the only other story between Jesus' birth and death in which Mary, his mother, appears. Jesus had returned to Capernaum in the early days of his ministry and great crowds followed him, so much so that the disciples could not even eat, we are told. When Jesus' family heard about his return, they went out to seize him according to the Scriptures, because people were saying that Jesus was literally out of his mind, as recorded in today's Second Reading. When Jesus heard that his mother and brothers came, and were standing outside the crowd asking for him, he replied somewhat disdainfully "Who are my mother and my brothers?", and then looking around on those disciples who sat about him, said "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mk. 3.31-35; Mt. 12.46-50; Lk. 8.19-21)

Mary is not heard of again in the Gospels until she appears there at the foot of the Cross, perhaps seeking to reconcile her

relationship with her son in his last hours. She is seen there along with the Beloved Disciple and those Galilean women who had been followers and supporters of Jesus for several years, standing afar off. I suspect that they all shared their sorrow together at Jesus' dying and kindly sought to comfort one another, including Mary, in the loss of their Master, her son. It is that reason, their collective sorrow, and not any commonly held beliefs about Jesus, which I think brought them all to be together there.

Remember it is recorded that the Beloved Disciple took Mary to his home at that very hour on Good Friday, and also that the Beloved Disciple was there with Peter early on the following Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene returned with the report of the Empty Tomb. Jesus' mother would have been unable to travel home to Galilee on the Sabbath after Jesus' crucifixion, and so it seems very likely that she would still be there in the company of the grieving disciples when Mary Magdalene returned from the Empty Tomb with her news, early that first Easter Sunday morning. When Jesus appears to the eleven disciples in the Upper Room that very evening, Luke's Gospel notes that there were others with them, but they are not named (Lk. 24.33), just as Luke records that there were other unnamed women with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the wife of Cleopas, who went to the Empty Tomb on that Sunday morning (Lk. 24.10). Mary, the mother of Jesus, was likely, it seems to me, to still be among Jesus' friends that

day, and thus to have at least heard the news of the Resurrection, if not to have been a witness to it along with the others. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is next mentioned in the Scriptures as being present again in the Upper Room, when the disciples returned there after the Ascension on Mount Olivet, forty days later (Acts 1.13-14). Thus it seems reasonable to me to assume that Mary, the mother of Jesus, became a part of that fellowship of Jesus' disciples only **after** the Crucifixion, became part of those who first grieved with one and another, and then who shared the experience of the Resurrection with one another.

The importance of this suspected Resurrection Appearance to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the known appearance to James, his brother, was that the Resurrection Appearances were not limited to some esoteric group of enlightened disciples and apostles. No, it appears that there were others there too who saw the Risen Jesus; some who we know did not believe in him, some who did not understand him, some who were even estranged from him. The Resurrection was not some kind of reward revealed only to the faithful, or some kind of self-hypnotic suggestion placed in the minds of his adoring disciples. The Resurrection was a mystery perceived by all sorts of people. It became a fact in their lives, and one that had to be reckoned with, one that altered their lives in unexpected ways. And as they came to respond to it, some who had not believed in Jesus, like Mary and James, became faithful and important members of the early Church, to

whom much devotion is later paid, all because the reality of the Resurrection changed their lives.

And it is their response to the Resurrection which, I believe, should encourage those of us, who are sometimes not faithful, who are sometimes not believing, who are sometimes not sure what to make of all of this, to be able to affirm the reality and power of the Resurrection in their lives, and thus in ours. Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia. AMEN.