

**For all the Saints - Maybe....
The Feast of St. James the Fisherman
The Very Rev. Tracey Lind
Chapel of St. James the Fisherman, Wellfleet, MA
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When I was a schoolgirl, we had to go to daily morning chapel. We lined up in the hallway by class and height where we were inspected for appropriate skirt lengths, clean blazers, and polished saddle shoes. If any one of these items was not in order (especially the length of our skirts), we were sent home to re-dress and marked tardy for school. Then, those who survived inspection processed into the chapel behind our class flags singing a variety of familiar hymns, our class favorite being, "For All the Saints."

When it came time for graduation, our class selected this same hymn for the processional. And so, on June 12, 1972, twenty-nine girls marched down the aisle of The First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, Ohio in long white dresses, carrying a dozen red roses, with tears in our eyes, singing at the top of our lungs:

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Whenever I sing this hymn (as we will do at the close of this morning's worship), I think about my school days and laugh. There we were, a bunch of kids singing about the saints. We didn't know anything about saints; we certainly didn't think we were saints, much less did we behave like saints; and yet, we were drawn to sing about them. We were what novelist Anne Tyler penned, "Saints Maybe."

In Tyler's 1991 novel *Saint Maybe*, seventeen-year-old Ian Bedloe blames himself for the sudden "accidental" death of his older brother. Ridden with guilt and filled with depression, Ian wanders into a storefront church. From pastor Reverend Emmett, Ian learns about atonement, forgiveness and "the religion of the Second Chance." Under the minister's watchful eye, he starts over, beginning from scratch, at the very ground level, stooping as low as he can, reaching as high as he is able, to become a living saint. In the process, Ian Bedloe becomes known as "Saint Maybe."

If saints are ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary things for the love of God, then each and every one of us is a saint – maybe. If saints are everyday people who demonstrate something of the power and richness of a life with God, then we all are saints – maybe. If saints are common folk obsessed with the goodness and love of God, then everyone is a saint – maybe. If saints are individuals who love their life with God so much that they are willing to give it away to others, then every person is a saint – maybe. If saints are people who have let God make them holy, then we are all saints – maybe. It is really a matter of potential. When we choose to live into our God-given potential as bright lights, salt of the earth, witnesses in the dark, holy ones in the midst of our secular world, we become saints, some remembered and others forgotten.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares that the commonwealth of God is composed of both the famous and the ordinary, all of the saints, even the "Saints Maybe." I wonder what Jesus' disciples, including our patron James the Fisherman, thought about their teacher's radical inclusiveness. Whom did they consider to be poor in spirit, whose kingdom is heaven? Which mourners did they believe would be comforted? Who were the meek that would inherit the earth? Who were those that hungered and thirst for righteousness, and how would they be satisfied? Who were the merciful, and how would they obtain mercy? Who were the pure in heart that would see God? Who were the peacemakers, the ones who would be called sons and daughters of God? Who were those persecuted for righteousness' sake that would inherit the kingdom of God? Were they Galileans, Judeans, Samaritans, and Romans? Were they both rich and poor, male and female, gay, straight, trans and non-binary? Were they Jesus' followers, detractors, disbelievers or skeptics? Were they Jewish or pagan, or secretively both? I suspect that for Jesus, the realm of God included all of the above, for I think he saw everyone as a Saint Maybe.

Toward the completion of his earthly ministry, Jesus spoke directly and privately to his closest disciples. Even though they had been told repeatedly that their leader was going to suffer and die, and despite the fact that they were now in Jerusalem and Jesus' words were coming to fruition, James and John, the Sons of Thunder, saw only glory ahead in the kingdom of God and the realm of sainthood. And they wanted in on it. They (and their mother) wanted the best seats in the house of the Lord. Jesus put them in their place. You want to lead; you want to be first; get ready to serve and to follow. Jesus made it very clear that in his understanding of sainthood, there was no place for arrogance and exceptionalism – only for companionship, community and servant leadership.

For Jesus, saints come in all shapes and sizes. Some are famous in their generations, but most remain unknown. Some are remembered in the history books, but most are forgotten. According to Jesus, being famous and having a big funeral when we die is not the point.

The way I see Jesus' teaching is pretty simple. A saint is someone who lives life to his or her fullest God-given potential and thereby shows us how Jesus would have us live. All of us have the potential to be saints. It's just that not everybody chooses to live up to their God-given

potential. But when we do, when we decide to really walk with God, amazing things happen. When we live up to our God-given potential: when we are merciful and meek, when we hunger and thirst after righteousness, when we are peacemakers, when we are pure in heart, do justice, love kindness and walk humbly, the halo of our sainthood shines bright for God and sometimes the rest of the world to see.

It took a while for James the Fisherman to figure out what Jesus was trying to teach about the way of God's expansive love. James had a fierce temper, a strong ego, a suspicious nature, and an insider's attitude. Remember how he wanted to send down fire upon the Samaritans because they were foreigners. But, in the end, his zeal for the way of Jesus resulted in his being the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred.

According to medieval legend, after being beheaded for heresy by King Herod Agrippa I in the year 44 CE, James' remains were brought by boat for burial to Galicia in Spain where the apostle had been on a preaching mission before being called back to Jerusalem. However, his remains got lost for nearly eight hundred years.



Again, according to legend, sometime in the early 9th century, some human remains were discovered by a hermit shepherd who was watching his sheep at night and followed the light of a bright star(s) – perhaps, the Milky Way (*Campus Stellae* in Latin) to a field where he discovered the ruins of an ancient cemetery. The shepherd told a bishop who examined the remains of the tombs and declared them to be those of James. The bishop told the monarch, King Alfonso II, who upon learning of this discovery, walked to Santiago, thus becoming the first pilgrim, and laying the path for the route that later became known as El Camino Primitivo. When the King arrived at Compostela de Santiago (The Field of Stars of St. James), he founded a church, which eventually became the Cathedral of Santiago. He also arranged for a monastery to be constructed to house monks responsible for guarding the church and James' remains. The relics of James were then officially buried in a silver urn, in a crypt beneath the main altar of the Cathedral, and became a pilgrimage destination.

In short, because of a bright light that shone in the night on a field where the supposed remains of James were buried, millions of pilgrims from across the globe, over thousands of years, have walked to Santiago.



The Way of St. James (as it's known in English) is sort of like our little path up the hill to this chapel. It's sandy, dirty and rocky. There are roots, weeds and wildflowers growing along the side of it. There's often a lovely breeze blowing through the trees. You don't see your destination until the last turn. And, as I learned first-hand when I walked the Camino in 2009, and as I know from my own experience of walking up the Chapel path for the past nine years, people often come to both pilgrimage and worship with worries and concerns that we are invited to leave at the altar and the foot of the cross. That's what the spiritual journey is about.

For nearly half a century, hundreds of saints and saints maybe, many of whom we will remember by name in today's necrology, some of whose cremains are buried in our little hillside cemetery, have walked our path - the way of James - to this Chapel to worship God and greet one another in the name of Jesus. As Bishop Morgan Porteus of blessed memory preached on St. James Day 2013, "In its simple beauty, this place is what Holy is to me...A simple building, a simple table. A group of friends and strangers looking at each other across that same table...being made one around this table when the Lord comes as he promised, to give himself to each of us and all of us." Then we, pilgrims in our own rite, are sent back down the path into the world to love God, neighbor, and self. What a wonderful tradition we've inherited.

Today, on our feast day, we remember not only our patron saint James the Fisherman, but all the departed saints of this chapel, including those who founded this summer congregation some seventy years ago: Elmert and Rosa Blakeslee, James Pike, John Coburn, and Morgan Porteus. Today, we remember Carey and Maude Melville and their daughter Maude Melville Arnold who generously gave the land upon which this chapel was built, and on Sunday mornings probably walked to church up the hillside path from their home on Cove Road. Today, we remember numerous individuals after whom Wellfleet beaches, roads, tennis courts, fish markets and art galleries are named: Newcomb, Hatch, Sears, Anthony, Walker, Oliver, and Mayo. Today, we also remember chapel members who died in the past two years: Ann, Mac, Jack, Daphne, Cam, Susan, Bob, David and Beverly.

None of these saints – pilgrims and seekers here in Wellfleet and Outer Cape – were perfect, no, not in the least; but, in their own way, they showed forth the brightness of God. That’s what it’s all about. We receive the light of Christ passed on by other pilgrims, and then do our best to light the path for more pilgrim seekers, including the next generation.

So my friends, every time you walk up that quiet, little, sacred path from the Post Office/WHAT parking lot to the Chapel of St. James the Fisherman, I invite you to remember the saints of this chapel – past, present, and those “saints maybe” yet to come – give thanks for their sainthood, and ask God that you may become one too! And as they say in Spain, “Peregrino, buen camino!”¹



All photos were taken by Tracey Lind on El Camino de Santiago, 2009.