

## When the Risen Jesus Appeared to His Brother

I Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:9; James 2:14-18

These Sundays in Eastertide we're taking a look at Jesus' resurrection appearance to his followers, today to own brother, James. In I Corinthians 15, Paul notes Jesus' appearance to James, but nowhere in the New Testament is it described.

What might it have been like? It does not appear that James was a disciple of Jesus during Jesus' ministry. Jesus' own family seems to have been worried about him, and may have tried an intervention with him. They had heard people say that he was "out of his mind", and they went to bring him home to protect him from the crowds, or from himself, as opposition was growing against him.

But after the resurrection appearance James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and according to Paul, was one of the three "pillars" of the early church along with Peter and John.

So let's take a look.

How would you like to have grown up with Jesus as your brother? Perfect Jesus, never making a mistake Jesus, rabbi's favorite Jesus. You wonder if he suffered the comparisons: "You're not like your brother Jesus!" Can you sympathize?

In Pat Conroy's novel, *The Prince of Tides*, the narrator is describing the rocky marriage of his grandparents, his grandfather who was a saint and his grandmother who took an extended leave of absence to go galivanting around the world, only to return later in life to her husband. The narrator says:

To analyze my grandmother's wilder, more secular biography, you must have some compassion for the impossibility of living out a life with a man committed to saintliness. *Saints make wonderful grandfathers but lousy husbands.*

Saints can make for difficult sibling relationships too. If prophets are without honor in their own country, they may be doubly so around the breakfast table or in the backyard.

We hunger for details about Jesus' boyhood and are given only one glimpse in the gospels: in Luke's story about Jesus at 12 getting lost when his family went to Jerusalem, only to be found three frantic days later in the temple. "Did you not

know I must be about my Father's business?" he said, and you wonder how his parents and maybe James his brother took it.

There are two apocryphal gospels now discovered that try to fill in the gaps of Jesus boyhood, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, (not to be confused with *The Gospel of Thomas*) and *The Arabic Infancy Gospel*. They plunge in where angels fear to tread and provide some stories which are a bit cringeworthy, a bit like a Superboy, "Jesus the Wonderboy" comic book.

In one story Jesus the boy fashions twelve sparrows out of clay. When he's accused of violating the Sabbath laws by working on the birds, he promptly turns them into live birds, and they fly away. How would you have like that way of getting out of trouble?

In another he helps his carpenter father Joseph who has mismeasured and mistakenly cut his board too short. Jesus takes the board in his hands and stretches it out to the correct length. That may stretch your credulity more than a little!

In another story Jesus is pursuing some children who do not want to play with him and are running to hide from him. Jesus finds them and turns them into goats. Their horrified parents rush to Jesus and plead with him to turn their children back into children. Jesus does, and now the children play with him!

(I'll bet they did!) You can imagine the parents telling their children: "Next time Jesus wants to play with you, play with him!"

Well, these apocryphal stories didn't make it into the New Testament for good reason. The stories didn't match the character of Jesus.

Showy miracles are not what made Jesus holy. His holiness was his always present desire to discover what his Abba in heaven wanted for him and for the world, and to do it. And it was what we could call his boyhood mysticism, his experience of the God he called *Abba*. He knew himself as one beloved, cherished by God.

But you can still imagine him missing his chores and arguing with teachers.

So what if Jesus was not a bratty wonder-working brother? What if he was the best big brother anyone could have? What if James adored his big brother? What if the reason he did not follow Jesus as a disciple was because he took the role of a dutiful son and took care of the family when Jesus left on his mission? (Joseph was probably deceased by that time.)

## II

So, what might Jesus' resurrection appearance to James have looked like? In all of his resurrection appearances, each was tailored to the follower's

needs. Like his appearance to Thomas, who said he would not believe in the Resurrection unless he could see the marks in Jesus' hands, feet and side. Jesus didn't begrudge his needs, nor ours. His appearances bestowed grace and forgiveness when needed, and all had the element of a call about them.

What if it happened something like this: James was devastated by his brother's death, not just the cruelty of it and the end of his mission, but also because he just missed him. As he was walking heavily along one day, Jesus came up from behind him and gave him the biggest bear hug, just like he had done so many times. Did he put his hands over his brother's eyes from behind and said, "Guess who?!" Did he tousle his curly hair like he always did when James was young? They sat down and began to share stories from the past, like the time they caught so many fish, Mary didn't know what to do with them and so invited the whole neighborhood for a cookout.

Did Jesus then say something like this: "James, you stayed behind and took care of the family so I could take off on my mission to the world. I've asked John to take care of our mother. Now I want you to take over. I want you as an apostle. The new gathering of believers in Jerusalem will need a strong leader. You can do it. Would you lead them for me?"

And James looked at his brother one last time. They exchanged their boyhood handshake, embraced and kissed each other. Jesus then left as secretly as he had arrived.

The *Gospel of Thomas*, an apocryphal gospel which some say should at least be an appendix in our New Testament, describes the appearance scene briefly with the kiss and the call to lead the church in Jerusalem.

### III

James became the leader of the Jerusalem church from right after Jesus' death to 70 C.E. when Rome destroyed the city and the temple. He was, yes, one of the three pillars of the church and helped commission a fourth, Paul, to his special mission to the Gentile world.

We don't know much about these years because most of the historical records were destroyed when Rome destroyed Jerusalem. But we know that he died a martyr to the cause of Jesus, led up to the pinnacle of the Temple and thrown off.

### IV

But there's one more thing I want to mention about the nature of his leadership and his theological and ethical contribution to the early church. You might call the *Book of James* an ethics manual for the early church.

New research reveals that James was called “James the Just”, or in Hebrew, James the *Tzaddik*. It meant James the Righteous One. His father Joseph was called the same in Matthew’s gospel. James sought to be just and righteous in the best sense of the word—a righteousness where mercy and justice were blended as one.

He, I think, was worried that some might use the word “faith” or the word “grace” as a substitute for right action and right living. James had a deep concern for the poor and concern about the social stratification in the new church. He taught that all were equal no matter your status in life. So in the Book of James he wrote:

Brothers and sisters, do you with your favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

He was quite plain spoken.

For if a person with gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes comes into your assembly, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say “Have a seat here, please”, while to the other who is poor say, “Stand there”...have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?  
(James 2:1-4)

Maybe that passage should be in churches' ushers' manuals!

James followed closely the things Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount. He took his moral teachings seriously.

And as for those who had a lot of "faith" talk and "grace" talk but didn't show it in the way they lived, he wrote this: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only." So he wrote on:

What good is it, brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but have not works? Can faith save a person?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacking the material necessities of life, and any one of you says to them, "God bless you. May you be warm and well fed", and yet you do nothing to meet their physical needs, what good is it? So belief, if it is not backed up by deeds, is dead through and through.

(Clarence Jordan's translation.)

But someone will say, "*You* have your faith, and *I* have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I, (he concludes), by my works will show you my faith!" (James 2:14-18)

Today, he might say, "you give me "Thoughts and Prayers" without deeds, and I will show you by my deeds what prayer really is!" I think the church in



America today needs James more than they know. He goes straight to the point: there is no true faith without faith in action.

Jesus followed the Hebrew prophets who challenged God's people about the falseness of religious ceremony and worship without living the righteousness and justice of God. Jesus challenged the overly spiritual types of his day as he said,

It is not those who say "Lord, Lord" who will enter the kingdom of God but those who do the will of my *Abba* in heaven.

I think Jesus and James must have talked a lot about these things. Do you want to be friends of James and Jesus today? I think maybe you already are.