

Simon and Jude

Well here we are – gathered together to celebrate the feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude. As is often the case, we don’t know a lot about them – but according to one tradition from the early Church, they shared a missionary journey to Persia and were eventually martyred there. Simon isn’t mentioned in the Gospels at all, except as one of the 12 disciples. And, we don’t know much about Jude either – some have argued that he was actually Thaddeus – listed as one of the apostles. But, we also see Jude mentioned 5 times in scripture – 3 times as Jude the Apostle and 2 times as Jude the brother of Jesus. As I said, we don’t have a clear picture – but we do honour Jude today as the patron saint of lost causes (that’s an interesting reference – and I do feel somewhat connected to him.)

So, in a sense, today we honour two saints who are largely unknown – we celebrate the lives of two apostles who were called to serve in ways that will remain quite mysterious. And, I find that idea intriguing. In a broad sense, today we are reminded that the story of our faith and our contribution to the building of the kingdom will pass unnoticed by many. So, we are shown something of what it means to give ourselves in service – to be part of a much bigger story - to build the church for future generations (who will probably not remember us), as God’s chosen people.

Today, we are reminded that the foundations of the church were laid by the disciples – who were ordinary men and women - called to serve, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Before the calling and the conversion of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus – before the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (given to Peter and the Church) - and before the crucifixion of our Lord – before all these remarkable events that have helped to shape our faith, on this day we remember the ordinary and largely unknown apostles who were there with Jesus in the beginning, when the foundations of the church were laid.

Today, we remember and give thanks for those who were first called to follow – from all those who were drawn to Jesus (and there were many), he chose 12 to become his disciples. Twelve were called to be his representatives – his hands and his feet – his eyes and his ears – a voice in the world, through which God could speak to future generations.

This was an awesome responsibility – not just for Jesus who called them, but also for the disciples who responded – who said yes – yes Lord, I will serve. This was a great and terrible responsibility - a calling that would help shape the future of the world. And, it was often a thankless job, but Jesus helps them to find their feet (he gives them a place to start).

According to our reading, before the 12 were called, Jesus climbed to the top of a high mountain and prayed to God, through the night.

Our reading doesn’t give us any details about what happened on that night. I like to think that Jesus and God shared a conversation – a vision of love and hope that would shake the foundations of the world and then echo down through the ages (a very serious conversation). Perhaps, they talked together about a new message of peace spreading out through the world – a peace shared by everyone - Jews and gentiles, rich and poor, slaves and free. We’ll never know for sure.

But, following that conversation – following that night on the mountain, Jesus returned and chose the apostles with great thought and care. So (again), prayer is the foundation for action – prayer is the starting point.

In Luke chapter 6, verses 1-11, the passage of scripture that comes before our reading, Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees for working on the Sabbath – plucking and eating grains of wheat. In his defence, Jesus talked about the need for food – a need prompted by hunger.

In a way, the apostles were called to stand in defence of that truth – to stand in opposition to the Pharisees and any law that would see the hungry remain unfed.

In that same passage the Pharisees attack Jesus again, for healing the sick on the Sabbath. And Jesus responds – he tells the Pharisees that it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath, not harm – to save life rather than destroy it. Once again, the apostles were called to stand with Jesus – to defend the truth – to oppose injustice, suffering and neglect.

This calling was a serious business. In verse 11, we're told that the Pharisees were filled with fury and began plotting against him (again). And the Pharisees were powerful – they were members of the Sanhedrin – the ruling council. To stand in opposition to these men was very dangerous.

So, the teachings of Jesus set him apart and the ministry that he shared with the apostles set them apart as well. (This is the heart of our reading.) Jesus called the 12 to speak in his name – to speak with a voice that would echo down through the ages.

Following that night of prayer on the mountain, Jesus exposed the 12 to a life of risk because he knew that the birth of the church would require sacrifice and patience and steadfast faith. And, nothing has changed.

In our own way, today we honour the faith of Simon and Jude – and the other largely unknown disciples – when we honour their patience and their sacrifice. And (again), we are reminded of what it means to serve – to follow in their footsteps – to contribute to the building of the kingdom for future generations (who probably won't remember us). But that's not the point. We are called to meet our God in prayer – to be transformed on the mountain, and then stand with those who feed the hungry, heal the sick and clothe the naked (as we see with the disciples). Like them, we need to be patient in the practice of our faith (the building of the kingdom) – we need to be steadfast, supported by prayer and the grace of God.

At times, we will be called to make sacrifices – Yes, from the many who follow, few will be chosen.

Today I pray that we will be gracious in our response to God. I pray that we will be filled with the Spirit and the wisdom of Christ – a spirit and a wisdom that laid the foundations of the church – And, I pray that we will be richly blessed.

The Lord be with you.