

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

28th October 2020



Today, 28th October, the Church remembers two of the twelve Apostles, St Simon and St Jude, followers and close companions of Jesus but otherwise quite shadowy figures. It is almost easier to say who they were not than who they were! Simon is not Simon Peter and Jude is not Judas Iscariot. Both Simon and Jude are included in the lists of the Apostles by Matthew, Mark, and Luke though only Luke calls Jude by the name by which we remember him.

Matthew and Mark give him the alternative name of Thaddeus. They are remembered together because legend has it that St Simon joined St Jude in Persia where they were both martyred in AD 65 and their relics were interred in a church dedicated to them on this date. Subsequently those relics were transferred to St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Simon was known as the Zealot. Possibly he was a member of that revolutionary group which wanted to overthrow Roman rule and he'd have been very reluctant to associate with anyone connected with those authorities. If not an actual Zealot, his alternative designation as the Cananean may have been derived from the Hebrew word for ardent – someone who, perhaps, was passionately attached to his Jewish identity. Tradition tells us that after Pentecost Simon travelled widely to proclaim the Gospel. If Simon were indeed a member of the Zealot party, following Jesus would have meant turning away from his previous violent affiliations and mixing with people like Matthew, a tax collector whom he would previously have shunned. Simon's zeal, whether or not initially politically orientated, became focused on his passionate commitment to Jesus.

Jude is probably best known as the patron saint of lost causes. Because people were most likely to associate his name with that of Jesus' betrayer, they didn't rush to invoke his aid and so he became a saint of last resort! He may or may not (!) be the author of the penultimate book of the New Testament which takes his name. Just as it is easy almost to overlook Jude himself, it is easy to miss the twenty-five verses of his letter which are sandwiched between the letters of John and the Book of Revelation. Jude outlines the way God's people have always had to struggle to keep on the right path. The words of warning against being led astray which he writes are I think as important now as when first written. Jude encourages us to preserve our Christian identity through prayer and trust in God's love and mercy especially when faced with difficulties and despite temptations of the world which seem to offer an easier and more comfortable way.

Shadowy but not insignificant figures who both offer us insights into what it means to be a disciple. This coming Sunday, 1st November, is All Saints' Day. On that day we remember not the high profile or named Saints, but all those people who have had a particular dedication and commitment to Jesus, which meant that the way they lived their lives set them apart. I love the description of a saint as someone through whom the light of God shines. In his sonnet for All Saints, the priest and poet, Malcolm Guite writes: 'The dark is bright With quiet lives and steady

lights undimmed.’ Their lives too show us what it means to live as a follower of Jesus. We may never know their names but I don’t think that would bother them any more than Simon and Jude would want us to know more about their lives. St Simon and St Jude would probably be surprised that we even remember their names, let alone think of them as saints. To the saints, even the well known ones, being recognised is not of the slightest importance. Living lives faithful to Jesus is the important thing. Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven’. Possibly instead of ‘give glory’ we could say ‘recognise’ or ‘honour’.

Maybe over the next few days we might spend some time pondering our own need to be noticed. We may decry the celebrity culture which seems to pervade our society; we may not be constantly putting posts on Facebook or Twitter about our activities but we may still need to ask ourselves some hard questions. Do we seek attention or recognition; approval and affirmation? If so, what drives that need? Henri Nouwen, an American priest and writer, struggled with these questions himself. He wrote:

‘Our true challenge is to return to the centre, to the heart, and to find there the gentle voice that speaks to us and affirms us in a way no human voice ever could. The basis of all ministry is the experience of God’s unlimited and unlimiting acceptance of us as beloved children, an acceptance so full, so total and all-embracing, that it sets us free from our compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired and frees us for Christ, who leads us on the road of service.’

I think this is what the saints have learned. What might they teach us? How might we return to the centre of which Nouwen speaks and hear that gentle voice?

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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