

Sermon on Wednesday 28 October 2020

by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

The Passion of Simon and Jude

(Reading: Jude 1. 17-25)

I know that it's coming up to All Souls Day and we will be addressing that shortly. In the meantime, we've just heard an extract from the short book of Jude, because today is the celebration of the Apostles Simon and Jude, lesser-known disciples and often overshadowed by All Souls, but worth a mention nonetheless.

Actually, not much is known historically about either of these disciples. There is no dispute about who *Simon* was as he is clearly named as one of the 12 Apostles listed in the Gospels. But there is an unresolved debate among biblical scholars about the true identity of Jude.

In Luke Chapter 6, we hear that: *Jesus called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

No Jude is listed, so it's assumed that 'Judas son of James' was renamed Jude after the crucifixion to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot, for obvious reasons. The question remains, however, if the book of Jude was written by Judas son of James, why does the author introduce himself as 'Jude, brother of James'? And if that's who he is, some early Christian traditions suggest that James and Jude were brothers of Jesus, which is confusing because the writer of Jude's epistle also calls himself the 'servant of Jesus', which

some scholars say you would be unlikely to do if you're his brother!

There's a lot more to the debate and it's very confusing so it's probably best to park it and accept the common assumption that the epistle of Jude was written by Jude the renamed Judas... or Thaddeus, as he is referred to in other gospels. Oh, it's far too complicated. Whatever he was really called, he was a good disciple of Jesus.

The Bible is fairly quiet about Simon and Jude, but, as they were disciples, we can safely assume that Jesus chose them; that they allowed their lives to be turned upside down; they lived with Jesus for three years; they saw the miracles; they heard his teaching; they had their moments of confusion and their moments of wonder; they fled when Jesus was arrested; they were present in the upper room when he revealed himself as risen from the dead; they saw him ascend into heaven; they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; they faced persecution from the religious authorities; they became leaders in the early church in Jerusalem.

The name of Simon the Zealot suggests that he was a member of the Zealots, Jewish freedom fighters at the time, but there's no proof of this. He's often depicted carrying a sword, but this because he met a rather gruesome death. Jude was zealous about the teachings of Christ in his own way and so he and Simon were probably a couple of firebrands among the disciples and they stuck together.

After Pentecost, Simon and Jude went off as a pair and started spreading the Word of the Lord with passion, travelling to several countries in the Middle East and Africa, from Libya to Armenia. Tradition tells us that they both ended up in Persia where they were martyred around AD 65, Simon (gruesomely) by being sawn in two. Don't think about it.

Anyway, they had this deep passion for their beliefs and this got me thinking about what passion is. Run the word 'passion' through a thesaurus and you get alternatives such as appetite, delight, excitement, enthusiasm. And I would add some of my own, such as perseverance, fortitude, courage and strength.

I was watching the news the other day and listening to the latest developments about the spread of coronavirus, not just in this country but around the world. The pandemic is on the march again. More areas of the UK are entering Tier Three, a lot of people are facing lockdown, with all that this inhibits - no going out for social reasons, no betting shops, fewer pubs and restaurants, shops closing, more people unemployed, more isolation and - this time - during the onset of winter, when you can't just enjoy the sunshine in the garden. I'm reluctant to say it, but as cases of Covid-19 spike again, a growing lethargy is descending on the country, a sort of weariness: Oh, not again, when will this end? Life for many people is becoming flat and boring; tedious and lonely for some. This plague is dragging on.

What we need is a bit of passion.

So, what are you passionate about? Most of us are fairly ordinary people who want to be faithful to God day by day, but most of us also have things about which we are passionate. Our faith should be among them, as Jude suggests in his book, but in the midst of ordinary life, we should stop and ask: 'What is God calling us to do with our passions?'

I don't think many of us are willing to follow Simon and Jude in forsaking everything for the sake of the gospel. That affects decisions about our whole lives: careers, money, time, relationships. But if we have something that we are passionate about, maybe this is the time to share it. Delight, excitement,

enthusiasm - that's what we need right now in the face of another rather depressing lockdown.

So, if you've got it, if you've got excitement, enthusiasm for something, like Simon and Jude, share it, because it will help rebuild perseverance, fortitude, courage and strength when it's needed in our communities.

Amen.

