

## SS Simon and Jude – *Who?* 28 October 2018

Today we're celebrating St Simon and St Jude. Who were they? What is there about them that we can celebrate? One thing is certain – they were both Apostles. But what exactly were Apostles – apart from the fact that there were twelve of them? Though even that needs some qualification!

Let's start with Simon – not, of course, his famous namesake, usually known by his nick-name Peter. Today's Simon is called 'the Cananaean' in the Gospels of both Mark and Matthew. *Not* 'the Canaanite,' there's no suggestion of non-Jewish origin; he was probably from one of several places called Cana. However St Luke, in his Gospel and in Acts, calls Simon not the Cananaean, but 'the Zealot', and for some reason that's the name that's stuck. Now the Zealots were not simply zealous in the religious observance: they were more like guerilla freedom fighters. It's hard to imagine one of them wanting to join Jesus's chosen few, and even harder to imagine Jesus choosing one. But maybe Simon had been de-radicalized by hearing Jesus preach. And there is plenty of evidence that all the Apostles found it hard to grasp just what kind of Messiah Jesus was, he so different from the more military one of generally hoped for. A surprising thing is that in Hebrew the two terms are equivalent: Cananaean and Zealot – who'd have guessed that? And maybe we're just left to guess which meaning really applied to him.

As for St Jude – well, he had the misfortune of sharing a name with the betrayer – 'Jude' is simply an anglicized form of Judas. In Luke's Gospel he's identified as the son (or brother) of James, maybe the 'James, brother of the Lord'. But in neither Mark's nor Matthew's lists of the twelve is there any second Judas. Instead there is a Thaddeus. Probably the same person, by a second name to avoid the stigma of Judas. It's also due to that risk of confusion that historically Jude has rarely been invoked in prayer, and seeking his intercession became a prayer of last resort, when all others had failed to deliver. Hence the patron saint of lost causes; and by extension, the one to help in finding lost objects. There's a passing reference in John, when 'Judas, not Iscariot ...' asks a question of Jesus, a question which shows another example of an Apostle not grasping the kind of Messiah Jesus was. There is a document – admittedly apocryphal – which tells of Jude and Simon later preaching in Persia, where both were martyred.

Anyway, they were both 'Apostles', the name Jesus gave to his chosen close companions, fellow-workers and support group, among the much wider circle of disciples, women and men. What did the word mean? In classical Greek, 'apostolos' was used mainly in a nautical context. It has the flavour of some kind of authorized agent, of one commissioned, designated as an envoy. It implies a connection both with the one commissioned and sent, *and* with the sender, the commissioner. Jesus was training the Apostles by his example and his teaching, to aid in his personal mission, and especially to be sent out, able to carry it forward after his departure.

So the name is more specific than 'disciple', which basically means a follower – of some teacher or leader. That can apply to those who had left home and livelihood and were following Jesus wherever he led; but also to those who stayed where they were, doing

what they had always done, but supporting his cause and testifying to his unique gifts, perhaps by word of mouth, but principally by a new lifestyle and values inspired by what they had seen of his life. More like what we might aspire to.

As for the Twelve, the space left by Judas Iscariot needed to be filled, so Matthias was elected; before very long, James 'the brother of the Lord' had slotted quite naturally into leadership of the new church community in Jerusalem, and into a widening apostleship. It was widened still further when Paul and Barnabas too became accepted as Apostles. Paul, clearly a controversial character, had to defend his right to be called an Apostle – both by pointing to what his gifts had achieved, and specifically by claiming his Damascus road experience was *an encounter with the risen Christ*.

This had been an essential qualification for Matthias, shortlisted because (I quote) 'he was one of those who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us – one ... to bear witness with us to his resurrection.' It's never said whether Barnabas qualified in this way, but he clearly was a person both admirable and likeable, a natural and genuine peace-maker, very different from Paul. We get the impression that Christ-like love shone from him in the heated controversies of the emerging Church. One who had indeed encountered the risen Christ in some powerful way.

We are not expected to be worthy of any 'inner circle' among disciples. Neither being ordained nor being a monk or nun or evangelist can begin to guarantee that! Oh dear, no. But we can, in our own small way, find something of that one first essential the Apostles had: which was to be with Jesus, to *know* him, and to know Christ risen and life-giving in *our* life, our inmost self. The means will be different for each of us – by whatever you or I find helpful: by prayer? by meditation? by contemplative reading of the Gospels? By the sacraments of Word and Eucharist? by absolution from our guilt? by helping others? above all, by recognizing his life-giving presence in daily life – in our work? (that may be hard); in nature, in the arts? ... whatever; and especially in people we can admire, and in those we can love... and then allowing ourselves to absorb what we find.

We don't have to search far and wide to find his presence. He is always there, always here, waiting for us to recognize him.

*Harold Stringer*