

Reflection: St Simon and St Jude, Apostles

Now during those days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6. 12-16)

The 28th October is the festival of St Simon and St Jude, Apostles. And you may know that last Sunday, I was invited back to the Church I belonged to when I was young, St Simon's, South Shields, to preside and preach at the 150th anniversary of the Parish.

You will know that Jesus sent out his apostles two by two to preach and to heal. And at the end of the lists of the 12 apostles Simon and Jude or Judas appear next to each other – we have to remember that two of the Twelve disciples were called Judas – this one is the good Apostle Judas or Jude (called Son of James), rather than Judas Iscariot the betrayer.

We don't know a lot about Simon and Jude. They will have heard Jesus' call 'Follow me'. They will have listened to Jesus' amazing teaching and seen his mind-blowing healings and miracles. They would have been in the Upper Room at the Last Supper; in fact, Jude asks Jesus a question during the Last Supper in John's Gospel). Jesus will have washed their feet and given them the bread and wine that are his body and his blood. Like the rest, in the Garden of Gethsemane they will have deserted him and fled. They will have known that agony that Jesus, their Master and Lord had been crucified, dead and buried. But they would have been with the other Apostles when they saw the risen Lord time and time again. And they would have been with them 6 weeks later when the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, transforming them from fearful disciples to fearless Apostles. Like the others, Simon and Jude would have been preachers, bringing people to faith in Jesus and establishing brand new churches. And they will have suffered. Tradition tells us that Simon and Jude became missionaries to Persia, modern-day Iran; Jude was killed with a club; Simon with a saw. We wear red vestments today to remind us that Simon and Jude were martyrs.

But the gospels do tell us one personal thing about Simon – that he was a *Zealot*. Now back in New Testament days, Palestine, the Holy Land, was occupied by the Romans. The Zealots were a group of radical Jews who wanted to overthrow the Romans by force. Some would call the Zealots freedom fighters or members of the Resistance; others might call them terrorists. There is no doubt that Simon was a radical; he might have been violent. One thing is sure; through meeting Jesus, Simon changed. He came to see that mattered was God's kingdom and the 'weapons' we use in God's kingdom are love, hope, faith, truth, compassion. If you asked me which Jews the Zealots hated most – well, it would be those Jews who threw in their lot with the Romans, especially tax collectors. And yet, in the Twelve Apostles we have Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector – two enemies who became friends because of Jesus. Jesus had this remarkable ability to bring people together and to use their energy not for evil but for good. I have a picture of Simon as someone who was zealous for the Gospel – a man of passion, commitment, whole-heartedness.

I love the word *zeal* – my dictionary defines it as fervour for a cause and hearty service. We follow the Apostle Simon's example when we have a godly zeal to share Christ's love. When we have a godly zeal to bring people hope. When we have a godly zeal to rejoice in forgiveness, to restore to people their dignity, to tell them that they matter. They matter because they matter to God.

We follow Simon, Jude, Matthew and all the Apostles when we point to Jesus and invite others to follow him.