



Sunday, 28 October 2018 – Feast Day of St Simon & St Jude & Bible Sunday
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Ephesians 2 19-end, Gospel St John 15:17-end
Focusing on togetherness
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

I said earlier in the service that today we have the double dividend of the Feast Day of St Simon & St Jude coupled with Bible Sunday: let's see if we can rise to the challenge and draw these two threads together.

It's true to say that St Simon and St Jude did not exactly hit the media headlines in their day or since, for example, I Googled churches dedicated to St Simon and St Jude: there's a St Simon in Jersey but the chapel dedicated to St Jude closed decades ago and none in Guernsey. It's good, therefore, to have an opportunity to recognise the life and work of two saints who largely glide under the radar.

St Simon, to distinguish him from the better-known Simon Peter, is often called the Zealot. The Zealots were a Jewish Freedom Movement working in opposition to the Roman occupation of Israel.

Happily, as it's Bible Sunday, St Jude gets recognition as the attributed writer of the penultimate book of the New Testament. He begins his Epistle humbly by informing us that he is a servant of Christ and a brother of James. It is possible that this is the same James who elsewhere is described as Jesus' brother. If so, Jude is not boasting about his connections other than as a servant in Christ's mission. Would we, I wonder, be so humble or be more like a name-dropper at a cocktail party! "Did you ever meet my brother Jesus?" How much better to be an introducer pointing people to Christ than pointing to ourselves.

Accepting that Jude is one of Jesus' twelve disciples he, together with Simon, and the others were key to Christ's ministry and mission and, therefore, justly deserving of their Feast Days in the Church's calendar of saints.

The beauty of Jesus's choice of disciples is that there's someone for everyone. Jude the writer; Simon the reactionary; Matthew the tax collector. James the foundational leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Then, there's the thoughtful introducers such as our Patron Saint Andrew who introduced his brother Peter to Jesus; and, Philip who crossed cultural divides pointing Greek pilgrims to Christ. But of course, there's the larger than life Peter, with a heart of gold who plunges ahead of the others, at times he gets it dreadfully wrong but he's so eager to do something worthwhile for Christ. Later, St Paul, after his complete change of direction in faith, became the biggest contributor to the New Testament. These prominent names cause the lesser known apostles to blend into the background. They went about their ministry purposefully without hogging the limelight: their very presence spoke volumes, as witnesses for Christ, just as we can be witnesses today.

Irrespective of their personality, the Gospel states, that Jesus gave the same message to all of them, as he gives it to us “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” Love breaks down barriers of misunderstanding and respects that we are not all the same but are of equal value to God. Jesus, however, is blunt: to ignore his commands is to sin.

How was it that the saints grew in faith but the Pharisees never grasped what Jesus was all about? Saints don't mushroom up over night but grow in faith feeding on knowledge founded on scripture – God's Holy Word - the Bible, as we know it today. The disciples had the insight to recognise the Word had become flesh in Jesus Christ when he lived among them. Faith can only become foundational if it is internalised and laid on our hearts. From those beginnings God can transform human life into its full spiritual potential. That was the lesson that the Pharisees did not grasp. Their faith was an external show based on scripture but with loveless, legalistic interpretation. They never learned to let their faith penetrate their hearts and so, as Jesus stated, “They hated without a cause.” They knew the scriptures but refused to know the Saviour.

No wonder then when St Paul began his missionary work, the Pharisees failed to grasp his message too, hence Paul directed his efforts amongst the Gentiles. In his Epistle to the early church in the great city of Ephesus Paul assures them that faith enables citizenship with the saints, as members of God's household. He urges them to have foundations of faith based on the words of the apostles, the prophets and above all making the words of Jesus their cornerstone to pin the whole Church together, as the body of Christ.

Today, we continue the work of the saints when we work together. So, here's the challenge for all of us ... how together are we feeling this morning?

Amen.