

Sunday 27 October, 2019

A sermon preached by the acting Precentor, the Revd Christopher Carolane, on the Feast of St Simon and St Jude.

Today we celebrate two saints of the church – Simon the Zealot, and Jude, brother of James. What do we know about them? Actually, not very much if we use only the Scriptures as our source.

They are both mentioned in our Gospel reading in the list of Apostles or “sent ones” – sent to share the good news of the Gospel. Little is known about Simon after Pentecost. He is thought to have preached in Egypt and then to have joined St. Jude in Persia. Here, he was supposedly martyred by being cut in half with a saw. However, the 4th-century St. Basil the Great says he died in Edessa, peacefully.

We know a little more about St Jude who was also known as Thaddaeus. He was the brother of James the less and was a relative of Jesus. He was beaten to death with a club, then beheaded post-mortem in 1st century Persia - modern day Iran.

So, if the tradition of Simon’s martyrdom is accurate, both Jude and Simon were martyred for their faith in the Lord Jesus, showing that their faith in Him was so profound that they were prepared to die for it and thus have left us a great example to follow.

There is debate amongst theologians as to whether St Jude the Apostle was the author of the Epistle of the same name, part of which we just read, or whether it was written by another Jude. Jude was an extremely common name in the first century. Most argue that the epistle was **not** written by the Apostle Jude for reasons we don’t have time to go into, but nevertheless, I want to spend a few minutes thinking about the verses we read from the epistle of Jude because they speak mightily into our situation today.

Jude writes to the faithful Christians of his day – those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ. Jude appealed to these people to contend for the faith that was entrusted to the saints. This “faith” refers to the body of information believed by the early church. It is a body of objective truth, not the subjective experience of believing something.

If we had had time to read the whole of the epistle, we would have learned that Jude was warning the faithful against false teachers who did **not** contend for this faith, but rather taught heresy. These false teachers:

1. Rejected authority
2. Blundered around in sin, worshipping God according to their own understanding, not according to God's revelation. They were eaten up with envy of others, hated others and had a murderous spirit as Cain (Genesis 4) did. In a word, they taught heresy.
3. They were deceptive leaders, gaining positions as shepherds in the church but they were only going their own selfish, lustful ways.
4. They were described as "wandering stars" heading into darkness. Perhaps this was a reference to a "shooting star" that appears for a moment as a flash of light in the sky but then disappears completely into the darkness.

In response to this bleak, false and dark, heretical teaching, Jude urges his readers to build themselves up to resist these ungodly people who will try to undermine them. He urges them to try to help others who might be taken in by them.

In verse 17 and following Jude writes:

Jude 17 *But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; ¹⁸ for they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts." ¹⁹ It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.*

Brothers and sisters, the faith of the church is still under attack from such false, godless people, and we are still witnessing divisions in the church, just as Jude's readers were.

Of the disagreements we observe today, without a doubt the most significant disagreement is concerning marriage equality for same-sex attracted people, calls by the Archbishop of Sydney for bishops who favour the blessing of same-sex marriages to leave the church, the divisions amongst our bishops so that a whole group refuse to attend the international conference of bishops held at Lambeth are just some of the disagreements that are real and are upon our church today. Such disunity is far from the unity that the Lord Jesus prayed for his church in John 17 when he prayed that we might be one, as he and the Father are one. I cannot understand how from a Christian perspective and with the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus called us to, we can resolve *anything* if we are not prepared to talk with each other and to listen and discuss in a respectful way.

What advice did Jude give to the first century Christians? What advice does he give to you and me in the 21st century?

Look at verse 20 – 23 of Jude.

1. Firstly, we should build ourselves up in our most holy faith (v.20). That is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ., who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12.2).
2. We should keep ourselves in the **love of God (v.21)**. Whatever we do or say, we must do so in **love**. In 1 Cor 13 Paul states emphatically: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels but do not have **love**, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers ... and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have **love**, I am *nothing*”.
3. We must look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life (v.21). This is the mercy that Jesus shows to *us* and to all people.
4. As the Lord Jesus Christ is merciful to us, so we must have mercy on some who are wavering (v.22), save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear (v.23).

How do we avoid heretical teaching and false shepherds? How can we overcome the divisions that plague our church?

We must build ourselves up in the faith of Jesus Christ (it is the **cross and resurrection of Jesus and salvation by grace through faith that is the heart of our Gospel**).

We must keep ourselves centred in the love of God. And this means that every word that comes out of our mouths, every action we make, every silence we keep, every move we make we must say or do **in LOVE**. There is no place in God’s church for hatred.

And what does that love look like?

1Cor. 13:4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

Finally, we must look to the mercy of the Lord Jesus to us and show the same mercy to others.

May God give us the will, and the grace so to do.