

*A sermon preached by The Reverend Canon Dr. David J. Anderson on the Feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude (transferred), the patronal festival of St. Jude's Church, Oakville. (Readings for the Day: Deuteronomy 32.1-4; Ephesians 2.13-22; Psalm 119.89-96; John 15.17-27)*

I speak to you in the name of The Most Holy and Blessed Trinity. Amen.

Over the past few weeks, the readings we have had from Luke's Gospel have generally been addressing the same question: "What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ?" Or, to put it another way, "What does the life of faith look like?"

We have been reading through a section of Luke's Gospel which describes Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, where his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension await him. The motif of Jesus' journey is, of course, a wonderful metaphor for our lives which also are a journey of sorts, a journey that begins and ends in God.

This morning's Gospel reading, from an entirely different Gospel—the Gospel according to St John—gives us a different opportunity to hear Jesus address the same question. Except now the context is different. The journey to Jerusalem has ended. Jesus and his followers have arrived, not only to Jerusalem, but to the very last night of his life. The beginning of the story of Jesus' passion and death is only moments away and Jesus and his disciples are cloistered away for a few final moments, a few last words, the closing of Jesus' teaching ministry.

In John's Gospel these final words—the so called Farewell Discourse—figures prominently and contains some of Jesus' most important teachings. As he teaches about living the life of faith he speaks about our intimacy of relationship with God. At one point, just two verses prior to where our reading today began, Jesus says, "I do not call you servants ... but I have called you friends" (v.15). The promise of friendship sounds lovely, doesn't it? But even the word *friend* as we use it does not really capture the nature of the intimacy of relationship that Jesus is inviting us to participate in.

If we read backwards just a few more verses, we have Jesus giving his famous saying about the vine and the branches. "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower" (v.1). Jesus continues with the invitation, "Abide in me as I abide in you" (v.4a). And he explains that to abide in him is to participate in God's life of love. "As the Father has loved me," he says, "so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (v.10). All of this underlines the fact that this sharing in the divine life of love is what life is really about—is really at the heart of what we call the way of eternal life—Jesus says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and so that your joy may be complete" (v.11).

What God reveals about God's self is God's life of love. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, bound in relationship of mutual love, overflows with love for the world and for every human being. God invites us into this relationship and into this life of love. As we share this love we become actual participants in God's divine life in the world.

It is this reality of our participation in the divine life that Jesus speaks of as we get near the end of our Gospel reading today. We have heard that God's life of love in the world faces opposition. The world with its selfish concerns is often hostile to the ways of love. Knowing that his followers are about to face the challenge of witnessing his own suffering and death, Jesus

makes them a promise. He will not leave them alone and defenseless in a hostile world, but he will send the “Advocate” (v.26).

The name of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promises to send is translated into English in different ways as Advocate, Counsellor, or Comforter. The direct translation of the name Jesus gives the Spirit is “Paraclete.” Its understandable why most English translations avoid that word, but it is worth unpacking. *Par*, in the Greek, means *alongside*. We find it in words like *paralegal* or *paramedic*. The second part of the name is *kletos*, meaning, *to call*. So the Paraclete is the one who is “called alongside.” I like to describe the Paraclete as the *neighbouring God*, the one sent to us come alongside us as Advocate, Comforter, and Neighbour. Remember too that the promised Paraclete in our Christian understanding is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, meaning that this is God: God’s own self coming among us, living among us, living God’s own life of love in us. That is intimacy!

The Paraclete is also the one who leads us into the truth. This neighbouring God comes among us to empower us to witness to God’s life in the world. “When the Paraclete comes,” Jesus says, “when I will send from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf (v.26). We know this divine life of love because we have seen it lived in the life of the Son. As we are now united with Christ in baptism, sustained in that life in Eucharist, we participate in that divine life ourselves. I love that word, *participate*. It has that same Greek root, *par*. In our alongside-ness with God we share in the divine life.

Imagine, if you will the scene of our Gospel reading for today. If, by the way, you are in your mind’s eye imagining the famous Da Vinci painting of the Last Supper, that is Saint Jude, second from the right.

Jesus reminds his disciples that they have been with him from the beginning (v.27). This means that they have seen all the signs that Jesus has done and know that Jesus is from the Father. The disciples, becomes apostles, meaning the learners are sent out to share all they have witnessed.

The Christian faith we share has been handed down to us. As our reading from Ephesians proclaims, the apostles are part of the foundation of the church. Faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles is our rich inheritance, stretching down to us through the centuries. Saint Simon and Saint Jude are among those who first proclaimed the message of Jesus that has been handed down to us.

The teaching of Jesus has indeed met with resistance, as Jesus predicted in today’s Gospel reading. The world hated Jesus and put him to death on a cross. The world hated Simon and Jude, both of them traditionally believed to have been martyred. In art, Jude is his often represented with a club, believed to be the instrument of his death, as Simon is represented with a saw. Tradition teaches he was sawn in two. We recognize that it can be difficult to remain faithful to the Way of Jesus when it demands sacrifices of us or when we face rejection. The divine life of love that Christ shares with us and in which we participate is not always welcomed in our world. Still, the gift of the Holy Spirit—the neighbouring God—who animates the divine life in and through us and who empowers our witness, offers us the assurance of God’s sustenance.

I appreciate the tradition that suggests that Saint Simon and Saint Jude worked together to preach the gospel in Persia. Our engagement in the mission of God is never a solitary endeavour. We are knit together in a community that is sent into the world with the good news of God's love, empowered to live a life reflecting that life of love. As God sent Jesus, and as the Father and the Son have sent the Spirit, so God the Holy Trinity sends us.

What I love most about Simon and Jude, along with the other disciples who weren't so famous, is their faithfulness to the community that followed the cause of their master. All of them failed in the moment of trial. The Gospels tell us that maybe John and certainly only a few women stuck around to see Jesus be crucified, but to a man, each of the eleven remaining apostles returned to the upper room in the days that followed. Each of them were filled up to overflowing by the sight of their Rabbi and friend turned Saviour as they encountered him in the resurrection. Each of them received the Holy Spirit with power and might on the Day of Pentecost. Each of them went on to share the Good News of Jesus Christ across the face of the known world. And each of them started out as regular people like you and like me. It was through their relationship with Jesus Christ that they went on to do great things. Each of us carries the same possibility within us.

From the little bit we know about the lives of Simon and Jude we can find an example of what it means to love one another: they stuck it out, even when times got tough. They might have waffled a bit on Good Friday, but Simon and Jude went on to be faithful witnesses of the saving power of Jesus because of the support and love they received from their fellow apostles, the wider community of disciples, and, if we believe the tradition that teaches that they travelled together for thirty years, the love they most certainly had for one another.

The life of faith is not easy, and following Jesus isn't something to be done in isolation. That's why the Church exists: to help us to love one another as Christ loved us; to help us understand what it means to follow in his footsteps; and to encourage us to share by word and action the good news of his life, death, and resurrection. May our patron, Saint Jude, and his companion, Saint Simon, be our faithful guides in this journey we call the life of faith.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.