

SERMON ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF ST JUDE  
St JUDE'S, BRIGHTON.  
SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER 2024

I could have wished for a less controversial saint to recognise in this sermon. Controversial because his name, lineage, the style of writing and ultimately the authorship of the letter are all open to scholarly doubt. Today is the Feast Day of Simon and Jude. He is partnered with Simon the Zealot. Was Jude also a zealous member of this warlike Jewish sect opposed to Roman rule? The zealots were uncompromising in their attitude towards foreign rule and those who were judged apostates, idolaters, and who lived unrighteous lives, lives that failed to honour God.

Apart from the symbol of a boat in the literature of this parish together with it showing on this building, and a reference to the ship (unfortunately with furled sail) in the short history of the parish by Lochee Andison, I had great difficulty finding a reference to it being a symbol for St Jude.

You see Jude is commonly depicted with a club. He is also often shown in icons with a flame around his head. This represents his presence at Pentecost, when he received the Holy Spirit with the other apostles. Another common attribute is Jude holding an image of Jesus, known as the Image of Edessa.

But at last I did find a reference to a ship! The ship represents the missionary travels of Jude. This conforms to what Lochee's reference suggests.

Does any of this matter? Authenticity is important and if we are to say anything about Jude or any of the saints of the Christian church one would surely wish for less variety of opinion.

Again, does any of this matter? I think it does! We usually name our churches after saints and claim them for ourselves because there are personal qualities about them that resonate with our sense of mission, our sense of purpose, even our location. But St Jude, claimed as the patron of this church and parish because of his travels by sea to do evangelistic work in distant places isn't a sufficient reason to hold him in esteem. What else can we discover about St Jude that is worthy of our attention?

Saints are meant to support, strengthen, and guide those who accept their patronage. How will Jude guide the people of this parish in spite of the brevity of his epistle and our uncertainty about him? How often has he been turned to for inspiration? The answer will be in both spiritual and terrestrial forms.

So....from his letter he tells us that we who are called to follow Jesus are loved by God the Father and kept safe for Jesus. Jude tells us that there is an abundance of God's love for us. But Jude finds it necessary to appeal to our ability to contend for the faith in the manner of the saints because we are called to follow in their footsteps. To follow in his footsteps!

Jude continues in his letter to guide us. He says, there will be those who will scoff at our attempts to proclaim a godly way of life under Christ. Beware of their influence to distract you from your righteous task. Pray in the Spirit, and remain in the love of God he says - presumably by being mindful of our calling to proclaim the mercy and love God has for

everyone. Jude is quite clear about this - have mercy on those who are wavering, save those who are in danger of adopting a way of life that is unsuitable for the followers of Jesus, and have mercy with a degree of fear for those who are immersed in an atheistic way of life.

Jude quite correctly does not rule out anyone from the mercy, love and attention followers of Jesus are to show to everyone. None of these are not mere platitudes. Each seeks a place within the doing of Christianity. I hope your Mission Action Plan is constantly reviewed and with reference to the guidance of Jude offers.

None of this will surprise us. But each of us needs to be reminded that if we claim to live under the patronage of a saint then deference needs to be given to them. For you it is St Jude who has gained the respect and the acknowledgement of the church since the second century AD. In spite of earlier doubts about its authenticity the church centres of Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome accepted Jude's epistle as authentic. Some notable theologians such as Clement, Origen and Tertullian, of the second and third centuries of the Christian era quote it as the work of St Jude. It is the canon of scripture.

Whether the Epistle of St Jude is of any use to the parish is for the parishioners to judge. But there is nothing contained in it that is objectionable or contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore the various elements that Jude highlights as worthy of serious consideration can be undertaken with confidence.

Today is a celebration of St Jude. And like all the saints of the Christian church they continue to support, strengthen, and guide the Christian church in its mission to evangelise people for God. Jude, whose patronage you claim and acknowledge will guide you, with the Holy Spirit, to love and have mercy on all in the community you are called to witness to.

You have a ship under full sail to symbolise the evangelistic work of Jude. May your ship continue to be under full sail as you take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the market places and streets of Brighton where it can be heard by others.

Fr John