

*St Simon & St Jude 2012*

Today, in the liturgical year, we celebrate two of the apostles, Simon the zealot and Jude, best known for being the patron saint of lost causes!

It is a late tradition that puts these two apostles together as a missionary team, travelling to Persia and Macedonia, probably being martyred in Lebanon. Jude the apostle, also known as Judas, not Iscariot, in St John's gospel, may be the same person as the apostle called Thaddeus, and may or may not be the same Jude who wrote the epistle of St Jude; and if all this seems a little vague, that is because whilst there are countless legends about St Simon and St Jude, including one that Simon the Zealot visited Glastonbury, in fact very little is really known about their lives or their deaths. Most of what purports to be true comes from the so called Golden Legend, a book of saints written in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century.

But isn't it fascinating that there should be a patron saint of lost causes.

Oh the lost causes with which I have been associated.

Aged 13, I would sigh with unrequited love for my friend's older brother. He, at 16, seemed the height of sophistication. He had been on a Top of the Pops show, he assured us that it was childish to like the Monkees, so pictures of them got torn down from the inside of my school desk and replaced with those who were less mainstream. He knew Long John Baldry, and when finally that singer got a hit song, I basked in reflected glory, even though I had never actually talked with him myself.

I was invisible to David, for that was his name. I was just little sister's friend. It was a completely lost cause. Yet for at least a year, his name was doodled on my rough book at school as he occupied my thoughts and dreams.

I went on to back a few more worthy causes, some of which might still be regarded by people as lost causes, but I hope ones with rather more meaning, ones that can be transformed into causes with promise with real chance of change - combatting climate change, protecting wildlife, working for justice, working for a reduction in spending on arms – all of which for me come under the heading of communicating the gospel. These days I don't seem to have time for campaigning, but on one occasion, many years ago, after hearing Lord Fenner Brockway speak, I went around Eastbourne knocking on doors trying to get people to sign a petition for the world disarmament campaign. Calling for multilateral disarmament can't really be said to be very revolutionary, but I was called a hooligan amongst other things for my efforts!

There are some causes that you know you cannot win, and yet to give up, to admit defeat, is not an option.

Perhaps that is why I got ordained.

Once, just once, I had a completely overwhelming experience of God's love. So although I cannot explain it, cannot prove it, can't even share it with you, I know, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that God is love. That I know with my heart. When I read the bible, and in particular the teaching of Jesus, my head attempts to interpret this in the light of that experience.

And what do I find? In both the Old and the New Testament there is a vision of a different way of living, where there is no more war, no violence, where people share and no-one goes hungry, where the weak are cared for rather than exploited, where the whole of creation laughs and sings for joy.

A lost cause?

St Simon and St Jude did not think so. They died attempting to persuade people that the words of Jesus were true, that he was God's Son, that if you followed Christ's teaching you were following God the Father. Simon and Jude had those three attributes that our Bishop cites in his call to Mission: Faith, Hope and Love.

St Paul, in that famous passage from his letter to the Corinthians, says the greatest of these is love. And so it is. But without hope, love never gets a chance to express itself.

We look at Syria and see the appalling bloodshed. We look at the thousands dying of aids, and the many more dying of malaria, we hear of the children abused by those they should be able to trust, we see the rich avoiding paying taxes, we see people living rough, we see species becoming extinct, our fragile beautiful world being desecrated for minerals and oil, and we think what can be done? There is too much that needs changing. It's a lost cause.

But have you seen how the earth can heal itself?

Go to any area where they have been felling trees. The machines lay waste the ground, leaving just ragged trunks. It is the most desolate of scenes. But, deep within the soil are seeds, and, in time, if left alone, first the vegetation and then the birds and insects reappear. It is not lost for ever.

There is always hope. There is that vision of what could be, what can be.

We work with God or we work against him

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

To love is to do God's work.

So we must fight the abuse of nature, the abuse of people, we must work for peace, for reconciliation and healing, we must do our best to eliminate the appalling gulf between rich and poor. And we need to do it with hope in our hearts. For this is the gospel in action.

We are called to fight for the lost causes.