

Aug. 9, 2020 -- (Pentecost 11, St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles)

Sermon Text – 1 John 4:1-6; John 14:21-27

- Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." -

- By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God... Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. -

It must be that some people just don't make a very big impression. Otherwise, we would know a whole lot more about them. They would have made the headlines, been written up in the record books, had their pictures splashed throughout the media. But not Simon, not Jude. Their names are there, in the lists of Jesus' disciples. He called them to be his followers. They are numbered among the twelve. But we know almost nothing about them. There are no accounts of their exploits in the Gospels, no renderings of their extended conversations with Jesus, no portrayals of their impulsive outbursts like Peter, or their realistic discussions like Thomas, or their crass requests like James and John, or their thoughtfulness like Phillip and Andrew, or their generosity and gratitude like Matthew, or their forthrightness like Nathanael, which we'll hear about in a few weeks, or their greed and betrayal like Judas Iscariot, or even their relationships like James, the son of Alphaeus. No, there is really nothing about them. But that doesn't mean that they weren't important. That doesn't mean that they didn't carry out their callings. That doesn't mean that they didn't live up to the expectations that Jesus had for them. It just means that it never got written down. So, we don't know.

What we do know is that Simon is sometimes called "the Zealot." Some have suggested that this means that he was a member of the political party of the "Zealots," that he was a part of the military forces working for the overthrow of the Roman government, that he was revolutionary bent on the liberation of the Israeli nation. But this seems quite unlikely, in that the Zealots did not exist as a political movement until 30 years or so after the time of Jesus. In the Biblical context, it more likely means that he was "zealous," or "jealous" for the keeping of the law of Moses; and, by extension, he may have been very serious about his following of Jesus, but that would be my speculation. He is also sometimes called "the Canaanite," which may refer to the ethnic origin from which he was descended, but that is also quite ambiguous. What we do know is that there is a tradition which connects him to Jude, as an apostolic

team, spreading the gospel of Jesus to Persia, Armenia and Lebanon, where the two of them are said to have been martyred on the same day in the year 65 AD. And that's it. That's all we know. Nothing more.

Jude does, at least, have a voice. He gets to ask one question in the Bible. During the Last Supper, as Jesus is telling his disciples that he will come again to them and reveal himself to those who love him, Judas asks for clarification, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" This is a good question. In his time with the disciples, Jesus has been available to everyone. Anyone could see him, observe his deeds and hear his words. But in his return, he's making it clear that not everyone is going to be able to comprehend his presence. How is that? How will he be hidden from some and revealed to others. The suggestion is that love will make all the difference. More on that in a minute. What I want you to notice here is that the gospel writer is careful to document that the disciple asking the question is Judas, (not Iscariot). This is important. It accounts for the fact that he is most often, in our English and French translations of the Bible, referred to as Jude, the shortened form of his name. Great care is taken not to confuse him with the Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Sometimes he is just called Thaddeus, or Judas Thaddeus, putting his two names together, again as a guard against confusing him with Judas Iscariot. And it accounts for the tradition honoring Jude as the patron saint of lost causes. It seems that as the custom of praying to the saints developed in the church, those seeking heavenly help in their lives didn't want to take any chances with their prayers by addressing them to Jude, lest they might get misdirected to the wrong Judas, in which case believers thought their requests would go unanswered for sure. Only after they had exhausted all other possibilities, were they willing to turn to Jude. Praying to Jude was seen as an act of pure desperation. It was the prayer time equivalent of one last fling down the field as time and hope is running out in a football game, like the play we refer to today as a "Hail Mary." This was a "Hail Judas," one last, desperate attempt, when all else has failed. Hence, he became known as the saint who deals with "lost causes."

I suppose you might agree with me if I told you that every human organization has some individuals within it who just seem to go about their business, get their jobs , done, do their thing, and don't make many waves or demand too much attention. They don't need to be in the spotlight or get all the recognition or take credit for anything that happens. They are modest, humble, quiet, unassuming and meek. They are the kind of people, Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, who would eventually "inherit the earth." I personally am thankful for them and their peaceful, quiet ways. I'm a big fan of those news stories that programmers often put at the end their

broadcasts on Friday evenings, as a way of trying to end the week and begin the weekend on a good note. They feature small, likely to go unnoticed and out of the way stories of people doing great things without making much fuss. This last week, one such story featured a young boy who had spent time in an orphanage. He had gone through the foster care system and been adopted by parents who were showing him great love. The remarkable thing about him was that he had developed a great love for the older dogs in the shelter at the local humane society. He was now going there regularly and volunteering to help feed and care for them, and encouraging people who came there looking for a pets to adopt the older dogs, rather than only consider-ing the puppies. Because of his own experience, he can empathize. He recognizes their plight. "People only want to adopt babies or puppies," he stated rather emphatically. He has become their advocate. And because of him, more and more of the older dogs are being chosen and are getting good homes.

That's love. That's what Jesus told his disciples would make all the difference. Those who love Jesus will keep his commandments. They will seek to do his will. They will be moved to fulfill his call to follow in his ways. They won't do it for the fame or the fortune. They won't do it because it makes them look good or gets them noticed in the eyes of the world. They won't do it so that the spotlight falls on them or they are remembered for their great deeds. They do it because love is an expression of who they are. Love is what they have been called to do. Love is how they have been motivated to live. Bruce McLaren, church critic and theologian, said at the "Church Anew" continuing education event I attended last fall, that, more than anything else, Jesus came to start a movement based on a radical, new principle – God's love. Jesus would show us how. Jesus would show us what it meant. Jesus would show us the way to go. He would die for us in the process of showing God's love, but would be raised to new life in a demonstration that God's love is stronger than anything else we might ever encounter. And in so doing, Jesus would establish a new kinship with all who live in that love. I believe and I hope that that is what St. Simon and St. Jude might teach us. We know so little about them. But being known is not the point of being a follower of Jesus. Love is what it's all about. And I want to believe they lived their lives sharing God's love with everyone they met.

Amen.