

Homily for Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Apostles
October 28, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Ephesians 2:13–22; Psalm 119:89–96; John 15:17–27

Lesser Feasts and Fasts is the name of the book the church uses to celebrate optional weekday commemorations; it also has material about the non-optional “Fixed Holy Days.”¹ Since the beginning of the pandemic and the advent of live-streaming, I have been writing out sermons for weekdays. Many biographical and historical sketches in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* are substandard in terms of content and accuracy.

One example, the entry for Saint Matthew on September 21, includes these words, “It may be that the author of the First Gospel.”—let’s stop right there. The entry capitalizes “first” and “gospel,” but doesn’t explain in what sense it is the first gospel. Matthew is first in the order of books in the New Testament, but there is a broad scholarly consensus that Mark is the earliest of the four gospels. About eighty percent of Mark is reproduced by Matthew and sixty-five percent

¹ *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006), 390.

by Luke.² That said, both evangelists use Mark to further their narrative and understanding of the Good News.³ So, what do we know about the apostles Simon and Jude? The earliest record, and probably the most reliable record that we have, are the few mentions of their names in the New Testament.

Mark's list of the twelve begins with Simon, whom he surnamed Peter. In the Revised and New Revised Standard Versions of the Bible, the eleventh apostle is listed as Simon the Canaanite. “Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him,” is listed last.⁴

Simon's epithet—description—“the Canaanite” is problematic. William Tyndale, the outstanding and gifted translator of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into English, read the Greek word here to mean Simon was from Cana, a Canaanite. The five commentaries I have on Mark all agree that the correct translation should be Simon the Zealot.⁵ In Luke's list

² Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 111.

³ *Ibid.*, 111–16. See especially the concluding points in this section beginning at the bottom of page 115.

⁴ Mark 3:14–19.

⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 264. Along with Charles Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (1959), Dennis Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (1963), John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (2000), Adela Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (2007).

of the twelve, he explicitly uses the word “Zealot”—the correct translation of the Aramaic word rendered in Greek as *kananaïon*.⁶ One can be very forgiving of William Tyndale for missing this.

I’m not sure why the Revised and the New Revised Standard Versions of the Bible don’t address this directly. Matthew’s list is essentially that of Mark.⁷ Beyond Simon’s listing as an apostle in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, there are traditions about him, but they are all later and uncertain.⁸ He and Jude are commemorated as martyrs, but there are no contemporary historical sources for this. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states that “the two are always coupled in the [church] calendar and in dedication of churches.”⁹

Now Jude. At the supper before the Passover in John, “Judas (not Iscariot) said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ ”¹⁰ John’s gospel does not use the word

⁶ Luke 6:15.

⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 66.

⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Simon, St.,” 1276–77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1277.

¹⁰ John 14:22.

apostle. But Jesus does speak specifically to the twelve after, it seems, the rest of his followers have deserted. The others walked away from Jesus when he finished his teaching on the bread of life. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”¹¹

Jude—or Judas—does not appear in Mark’s list of the twelve. But he has an apostle named Thaddeus.¹² Like Mark, Matthew also has a Thaddeus and no Judas, not Iscariot.¹³ Luke does include Judas son of James in his list of the apostles.¹⁴

For most of the Christian Era, the Letter of Jude was regarded as being written by Jude, or Judas, the brother of James—but which James is not at all clear.¹⁵ It begins, “Jude, a slave –or servant—the Greek word doesn’t distinguish—of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the

¹¹ John 6:53–54.

¹² Mark 6:16–19.

¹³ Matthew 10:2–4.

¹⁴ Luke 6:13–16.

¹⁵ Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter, Daniel J. Harrington, Jude and 2 Peter, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 182.

Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ: may mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.”¹⁶

We don't know how Simon and Jude pursued the call they had from Jesus. We don't know how these men died. Were they executed because they preached Jesus Christ? We don't know. But the word martyr comes from the Greek word meaning witness. We have no reason not to think that these men, whatever their names, were witnesses to the death and resurrection of the Lord. We have every reason for praising the first generations of believers whose words and deeds helped bring people to believe in the God we confess Jesus died and risen.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹⁶ Jude 1–2.