

Wednesday October 28th: Hey Jude!

Feast of St Simon and St Jude: Jude 1-8.

Jude 1-8

Today is the feast of Saints Simon and Jude. What do you know about them I wonder? Not a lot, I'll bet. One of the shortest books in the Bible is the Letter of Jude. It's so short it isn't even divided into chapters. In the Book of Common Prayer, the epistle that is given for the Feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude comprises the first eight verses of the letter of Jude.

These verses contain a warning against *'certain men who crept in unawares'* against which the writer of the letter calls on the church to *'contend'*. These men are accused of *'turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.'* (Jude 4)

Just so you know what happens to people like this the letter writer says, *'I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting darkness unto the judgement of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, in like manner giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.'* (Jude 5-7)

This is the theme of the whole letter. It is a warning against people coming into the church in order to lead it away from Christ.

It is astonishing to think that the early church, even when it was small and

persecuted, was sufficiently concerned about false teachers infiltrating its ranks that they included this letter in the canon that became the New Testament.

It is easier to see why the text is included in the prayer book. The reformation that gave us the prayer book in our own language was a time when former leaders had to be condemned in order that the people be brought back to God through Jesus Christ. It would have been reassuring to read that the church has had to be alert in this regard since its inception. And the Old Testament antecedents of the stiff-necked people in the wilderness, Sodom and Gomorrah and the fallen angels offer further reassurance that it was meet, right and indeed our bounden duty to reject false leaders.

The letter of Jude doesn't get much attention these days, but its message is still relevant today.

A couple of weeks ago the report 'Betrayal of Trust' was published. It is an independent enquiry into the allegations of abuse against Victor Whitsey a former Bishop of Chester.

Victor Whitsey died before any of these allegations were out to him so the report can only make conclusions 'on the balance of probabilities'. However, the evidence against him comes from many sources and is very credible. The pain of his accusers must be very great. It seems astonishing that such a man ever became a Bishop and was allowed to do the things he did with impunity.

And yet that does appear to be what happened. And because it happened, many people suffered, and many others were confronted with decisions and I'm afraid some of those decisions we now see were errors. Errors

which allowed the pain of injustice to continue and, in some cases, more abuse to happen.

I'm comforted, reading the report that a number of people in our diocese, including a number of parish priests, did make the right decision at the right time. I'm concerned that the closer people got to the power to make a difference, the more difficult it seems to have been to get those decisions right. Maybe that is to be expected.

It's horrible — but necessary — to acknowledge that our diocese has been a place where abuse has flourished. As Jude warns us, we must be prepared to contend against that. We must repent, allow ourselves to be transformed by God's Holy Spirit and contend for the faith delivered to the saints and passed onto us. That's the message of Jude's short letter. May the church hear this message again today.

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28th October 2020