

Lent Compline Talks 2019

St Mary's Kidlington

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Lent 4: Jesus appears to the eleven in Jerusalem

This Sunday we continue to look at the 'back-story' of the resurrection appearances and, in particular the sense of desolation and fear felt by all the followers of Jesus in the days after his arrest and crucifixion and before the impact of the resurrection was really grasped. Last week we looked at the two men who encountered the risen Christ at Emmaus and rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples. The end of Mark continues "Afterwards, when the eleven were at table, Jesus appeared to them and reproached them for their incredulity and dullness because they had not believed those who had seen him after he was raised from the dead". Matthew's gospel makes no mention of an appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples in Jerusalem but Luke and John have a similar passage. John's gospel, says "Later that evening (the day of the resurrection) when the disciples were together behind locked doors, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them".

Who were this group, huddled together a room, behind locked doors, fearing for their very lives? It was Jesus' disciples, but according to John not Thomas - we'll come to doubting Thomas another week - and the group of women including Mary Magdalene. Tonight, I want to consider what we know about those 10 fearful men who had invested so much in following Jesus in his ministry, who had deserted him when he was arrested and crucified, and who were now hiding in a locked room. How many of the ten could you name? What do we know about them? And what can we learn from the little we do know?

Let's start with Peter, or as he was originally in Greek, Simon son of Jonas; a married man and a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum. He may be the author of the two epistles that bear his name. Like most of the other disciples Peter was a Galilean. The contemporary writer Josephus says of Galileans "They were ever fond of innovation and by nature disposed to change and delighted in sedition. They were every ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection; quick in temper, given to quarrelling, but very chivalrous; easily aroused by an appeal to adventure, loyal to the end." Jesus clearly did not choose 'easy' companions! Peter was the leader and spokesperson of the twelve during Christ's ministry and became one of the major players in the early church in Jerusalem. Hauled up before Annas, Caiaphas and the Jewish hierarchy (who sneeringly called Peter and John 'untrained laymen') to explain their preaching and especially the sin (in their eyes) of healing of a cripple on the sabbath, they were ordered to refrain from all public speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. From Josephus' pen-portrait it's no surprise that this had no effect on either man and Peter continued to preach to the Jews. Tradition says he went as far as Babylon and that he was crucified, head down, in Rome.

Andrew was also a Galilean fisherman and it was he who either introduced his brother Peter to Jesus or was called with Peter by Jesus. Andrew may earlier have been a disciple of John the Baptist. We hear little more about him in either the gospels or Acts, but he is said to have preached widely, and is claimed by Greece, Russia, and Scotland as their patron saint. In Greece he healed a governor's wife but was later arrested and crucified on an X-shaped cross, the St Andrew's cross that forms the Saltire - the flag of Scotland.

James the elder and his brother John (the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'), were sons of Zebedee and Salome and also fishermen in Bethsaida. Apparently, they were reasonably well off (Zebedee had hired servants in his fishing business). James and John always

appear together in the New Testament, but little is said about James. He is said to have been the first of the twelve to be martyred. John, his brother, however, has many mentions in the New Testament. He was apparently very ambitious, a man with an explosive temper (hence the name 'Boanerges' - 'son of thunder') and is said to have preached in Asia minor. (One Wikipedia source I found states glibly that he wrote the Gospel of John, the three letters of John and the Revelation, which just shows how careful one must be with on-line sources, because all authoritative texts say this is nonsense!) We'll come back to this John later.

Philip, John's gospel tells us, was the first Bethsaida fishermen to whom Jesus simply said "Follow me". Having met Christ, Philip immediately rushed off to find his brother Nathanael saying "We have found the man spoken of by Moses in the Law", Jesus from Nazareth". When Nathanael protests "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip simply replies "Come and see". If he did join the disciples he is never again mentioned. And whether this Nathanael is the same as the apostle Bartholomew as some claim, seems unlikely. The name Bartholomew means 'son of Talmi'. Ancient references have Bartholomew roaming widely as a missionary ending in Armenia (with Jude 'Thaddeus') or India where he was reputedly martyred by being skinned alive.

Very little is known about James the lesser. He was yet another Galilean and perhaps brother of Jude, or even a brother of Jesus. He may have preached in Palestine and in Egypt where he is said to have been crucified; we really don't know. Jude, or Judas Thaddeus, may have been a zealot. John's gospel tells us that, at the last supper, when Jesus says "He who loves me and obeys my commands, I will love him and disclose myself to him" Judas says "Lord, what can have happened, that you mean to disclose yourself to us and not to the world?" This suggests an interest in worldly power. Christ's answer stressed the way of love rather than that of power. Jude is said to have gone on to preach (perhaps with Simon zelotes), both being killed in Beirut according to an ancient *Acts of Simon & Jude*. Jude is the patron saint of lost causes (and also bizarrely of the Chicago Police Department). We know even less about Simon Zelotes (Simon the Canaanite) except that he was another zealot, and fervent in the struggle for the purity of the Jewish religion.

Finally, we come to Matthew (or Levi - it was common to have two names; Matthew comes from Matt (gift) & Yahweh). Matthew was very different from all the other Galilean fisher-folk we have so far considered. He lived in Capernaum and was a tax-collector. The King James version calls him a 'publican' but that doesn't mean an inn-owner, but a man in public service, handling public money. He was probably the only of the apostles who could write. Devout Jews at that time hated tax gatherers first because they thought God was the only one to whom it was right to pay taxes and second because most tax gatherers were notoriously unjust. Matthew is said to have preached and been martyred in Ethiopia.

What can we learn from these very sketchy and disputed facts about this largely illiterate and hot-tempered group of men who were Jesus' intimate companions throughout his earthly ministry who, after his arrest, deserted him and fled? Not, you would think the ideal ministry team! The first is that Jesus called local men, even one who would probably be despised by the others. Jesus calls us all, whatever our situation. Like the disciples, our response must be to join Him in His mission, perhaps even leaving our established way of life. Second, having been called, our lives may be altered in unpredictable ways and are unlikely to be all plain sailing. Third, like the apostles we may, because of our own preconceptions, fail properly to understand Jesus's message and, whatever our protestations of faith, may desert or even deny our Lord when tested. But, finally and very positively that, having been touched by Christ, and having tried to follow him however imperfectly, like the apostles, we have a Christ-given mission to spread the

good news of the Gospel to those we meet and will be given the strength to do that. We're unlikely to travel widely, preaching, and be martyred for our faith, but we are called to live the gospel in our daily lives and share the good news with those we meet, day by day.