

## Less Familiar Disciples 1: THADDEUS

Matthew 10:1-8 [MW20-23]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 14 June 2020

A pig and a hen sharing the same barnyard heard about a church's programme to feed the hungry. The pig and the hen discussed how they could help. The hen said, "I've got it! We'll provide bacon and eggs for the church to feed the hungry." The pig thought about the suggestion and said, "There's one problem with your bacon and eggs solution. For you, it only requires a contribution, but from me, it will mean total commitment!" That's the cost of true discipleship.

Some of Jesus' disciples we know lots about

- just think of Andrew, Peter, Thomas ... Judas
- others seem very obscure, their names are nowhere near the tip of our tongue

In the movies, in the opening credits, the big stars have their big names in big letters

- then, almost as an after thought
- comes the 'also featuring', not also *starring*, also *featuring*
- with names in very small letters near the bottom of the screen

It could seem like that with Jesus' disciples

- some seem to have 'star billing'
- while the rest are just there to make up the numbers
- yet those 'also featuring' disciples are there for a reason

So I set myself an assignment

- find out something, anything, about some of these other 'less familiar' disciples
- and then reflect on what this means for us, what it says to us
- who are disciples and followers of Jesus in 2020
- and I guess you benefit, or otherwise, from this!

So today we begin with Thaddaeus

- we know that he was a man
- that his name was Thaddaeus
- that he was called by Jesus, and that he responded
- he seems, at least initially, to be in that 'middle ground'
- he did not do anything really bad, make a mistake, fall from grace
- in a way that was remembered and recorded for posterity
- nor did he do anything so spectacularly outstanding
- so that it stood out

In this respect Thaddaeus is perhaps like the majority of Jesus' followers

- we've heard of them, know their name, maybe even where to find them
- yet we have no idea what they did or are doing
- they just continue on faithfully
- what they did, what they are doing, makes a difference
- but perhaps it is not obvious in this life
- not obvious to other followers or themselves
- yet their contribution is invaluable

So I thought, may be Thaddaeus' gift to us is encouragement

- we like him are called by Jesus, called by name, to get on with the job

Then I made a startling discovery, all to do with names

- it seems that perhaps Thaddaeus is not as unfamiliar as I had at first presumed
- I looked up Thaddaeus in the trusty *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* a faithful reference tool since my first year at theological college
- do you know what it said?
- “Thaddaeus” see “Judas 8” ... “Judas 8”? what’s that all about

So I went back to my Bible

- Matthew 10:1-4 and Mark 3:16-19 give a list of those chosen to be Apostles the inner circle, tenth in that list is Thaddaeus
- John, interestingly, has no list of Apostles or disciples while Luke 6:12-16 has a very interesting list, no Thaddaeus but at number eleven, Luke lists: “Jude, son of James”

Could it be that the ‘Thaddaeus’ of Mathew and Mark ... is the ‘Jude’ of Luke?

- and you know what, Jude is not quite so obscure
- in fact he has a saint’s day on October 28, but let’s not get ahead of things

This is what it says in that Bible dictionary, the eighth entry under ‘Judas’:

According to Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, the son or brother of James, and one of the twelve apostles. Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18 have “Thaddaeus” instead of this name. Luke probably supplies the true name of this apostle. Thaddaeus (from a word meaning “breast nipple”) may be a descriptive designation of the apostle, introduced to avoid confusion with the traitor and because of the odium attached to his name.

John 14, verse 22 says

*The other Judas, not Judas Iscariot, then spoke up*

That is rather unfortunate, sad really

- to be known as the ‘other Judas’
- in English this has become “Jude”
- to avoid confusion with the other guy, the bad one
- so we now have St Jude, but definitely no St Judas!

Scholarly wisdom has it that this ‘multiplicity’ of names

- was not intended to confuse this apostle’s identity
- but arose because of embarrassment
- as one writer says:  
“in the Gospels the evangelists were embarrassed to mention the name of Judas”
- one can correctly assume that the evangelists wanted to re-establish a good name for this apostle among his companions and especially among the people

Roman Catholics appear to have got their heads around all this by calling this apostle

- St Jude Thaddaeus, so that “Thaddaeus” is the surname or family name

Jude Thaddaeus’ main claim to fame in the gospels

- is that he asked a question at the Last Supper:  
“Lord, what do you mean by saying that you will show us what you are like, but you will not show the people of this world?” (John 14:22)
- a question that introduces some comments of Jesus about the coming of the Spirit

Some believe that Jude Thaddaeus the apostle is the author of the letter of Jude

- the second to last book in the New Testament

however this is not at all certain  
and has been a subject of debate by biblical scholars throughout the centuries

- we do know for sure however that St Jude is remembered along with St Simon on October 28 and our own *For All the Saints* says this:

Beyond the mention of their names in the lists of Apostles in the New Testament, we know little about these disciples; and after Pentecost we hear nothing of them apart from the tradition of their joint work and martyrdom in Persia. Even the information we have is conflicting and not always easy to interpret.

However, as a friend of mine was fond of saying

- never let the truth get in the way of a good story!

there are a few legends surrounding Thaddaeus,  
this is perhaps the best documented ...

Eusebius of Caesarea recorded that King Abgarus of Edessa wrote to Jesus, asking him to come cure him of an illness. Instead, Thaddeus is said to have come, bearing a cloth featuring Jesus' facial features, by the virtues of which the king was miraculously healed. This relic became known as the Image of Edessa, which some modern researchers believe is misinterpreted today as the Shroud of Turin.

Then there is a document titled "The Acts of Thaddaeus"

- which seems to date from around the fifth or sixth century

here is an excerpt

... the multitudes brought together their sick and demoniacs. And Thaddaeus, having gone forth along with his disciples, laid his hand upon each one of them, and healed them all by calling upon the name of Christ. And the demoniacs were healed before Thaddaeus came near them, the spirits going out of them. And for many days the people ran together from different places, and beheld what was done by Thaddaeus. And hearing his teaching, many believed, and were baptized, confessing their sins.

Having therefore remained with them for five years, he built a church; and having appointed as bishop one of his disciples, and presbyters, and deacons, and prayed for them, he went away, going round the cities of Syria, and teaching, and healing all the sick; whence he brought many cities and countries to Christ through His teaching.

Trying to find out anything more, even with the advantages of scholarly wisdom

- technology and the internet

is a bit of a lost cause

- which is kind of interesting because Jude is the patron saint of 'desperate cases' and 'lost causes', although it's not clear why!

Perhaps we could continue with the theme of 'encouragement'

- to be encouraged and cheered in our lives

with all the ups, downs and in-betweens

- to remain faithful in the knowledge that everything is in God's hands

as perhaps this following story highlights:

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of their home on a legal technicality, and he had to work to help support them. At age nine, his mother died. At twenty-two, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough. At twenty-three, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. At twenty-six, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay. At twenty-eight, after courting a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. At thirty-seven, on his third try, he was elected to Congress, but two years later, he failed to be re-elected. At forty-one, his four-year-old son died. At forty-five, he ran for the Senate and lost. At forty-seven, he failed as the vice-presidential candidate. At forty-nine, he ran for the Senate again and lost. At fifty-one, he was elected president of the United States. His name was Abraham Lincoln, a man many consider the greatest leader the United States ever had. Some people get all the breaks.

Most important perhaps is not his name, not the deeds he did

- not what we know or don't know  
perhaps the most important thing is that Judas, not Iscariot  
Jude, Thaddaeus, is in the list of disciples at all
- his presence there reminds us to answer the call  
to be faithful, to listen, to follow, to go where the Lord sends us  
to speak to those the Lord brings across our path

May what was true for Thaddaeus be true for us

- his deepest wish was to emulate Jesus Christ  
he made Jesus his guide not just because he believed in his teachings  
but because of Jesus' love for him and his love for Jesus

May we too live and share the Good News

- because we, you, me, all of us, have been especially called by Jesus Christ