

They say you should never preach about something of which you know little or nothing. Rarely stops anyone in the pulpit, but the manual insists that you always choose to speak from your knowledge or your experience, or better, both. People, so the wisdom goes, have highly developed sensors to detect fibs and fantasies, so don't try winging it, or you'll crash and burn. So when I was weighing up this morning which of two topics to start with before I ease us in to the theological bit, I thought I'd plump for the one which best fits the forgoing rules of the pulpit, and so I am going to begin by starting speaking from my knowledge and experience of... football teams. Now my knowledge of football teams would comfortably fit on the back of an envelope. A small envelope, the kind that you might get in a florist shop attached to a bouquet. But small though it may be, knowledge it is; that there are eleven members of a football team on the pitch at any one time, and these eleven comprise of those up front, those in the middle, those in defence and one goalkeeper. My hands on experience of football teams is mostly limited to schooldays and the processes involved in picking the members of one. I hasten to add I have never been the person doing the picking, which is probably a good thing if a team ever wanted even the tiniest sliver of a hope of winning: I have not picked, I have merely watched someone else doing the picking. As far as I can see this is mostly a fairly straightforward process but a problem does arrive once you've got to the stage where you've picked nine for your team. Because the last kids left are self evidently going to be the ones you don't want. This boils down to those kids that everybody knows will grow up to be, even if nobody quite understands what it means yet- the gay boys (welcome to my childhood) and thus although they are almost certainly the brightest, smartest and funniest of all your friends they are also absolutely lousy at sports. But even these are never, however, the last kid to be picked, that of course, is always the boy who's got a big love thing going on with pies, (I grew up in the North where everybody loves pies so that kid must have been really serious). That kid always ends up in goals on the atavistic grounds that the bigger you are the more difficult it is going to be for anyone to get a ball past you into the back of the net. This then, is my knowledge of football teams.

Some of you may be recognising the scenario, some of you might have to mentally put on a netball kit to make it make sense, but for some it will have no resonance at all so I'll be nice to you this morning, give us the best of both worlds and dig out the second topic I'd considered for the illustration, which is shopping. I reckon with shopping and football I've probably got most bases covered.

If you hadn't worked out what was going on from the football example- and I have to admit I never have- what this is about is those times in life when you have everything you want (nine players) and would happily retire from the fray but you still have to keep going because the rules say you have to have more. So it might be all those books that sit unread on your guilty-shelf gathering dust which you bought because the book you wanted to read was in a 'buy one get one half price' offer and though you didn't really want those extra tomes, the rules of the shopping game said 'don't give up now, keep going- look it's a special offer'! Maybe ponder the the desperate effort to find 50p's worth of something, anything, you want so you can just scrape past the online supermarket's minimum order total: which is least likely to sit on my shelf unused till it goes past the expiry date, smoked garlic or sun-dried tomatoes? Or staying online- despite appearances, we're all part of the future here- perhaps we're talking about those things that you don't really want but you're adding to the order so you qualify for free delivery. You don't want them, but hey, you can always pop them in a drawer and donate them to the church christmas bazaar in 20 years time.

Hopefully by now I have established in your attention the theme of this address. This sermon is about the makeweights, the fillers, and the paddings of life.; the things which are added just to make up the numbers, those blank pages at the back of the book, the carrot crudités at the buffet, the Cliff Richard track on the Christmas CD.

We're thinking this way today because all day it's the feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude. Simon and Jude, the makeweight Saints.

Both Simon and Jude make their appearances when the gospels list the twelve. They're in the list, and that's it. Simon and Jude are Apostles, that band closest to Jesus in his earthly ministry, appointed by him to carry his message to the four corners of the world. You might thus find 'makeweight' an odd way to describe those venerable fathers of our faith. But, let me ask this question. What do you know about Saint Peter or Saint Paul? The answer is probably not a lot, but as they're two of the big stars of the saintly firmament it might be something, even if it's just Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was follicley challenged. That said that's more than you would know about St Andrew or St Matthew, though you might just be able to scrape up their occupations from the a half remembered stained glass window. But even that Andrew was a Scottish fisherman and Matthew worked for the Inland Revenue is almost certainly more than you know about Saint Simon or Saint Jude. Hey these guys don't even get a feast day to themselves, they have to go

Dutch. Although later legend does have them as a double act, dying together while taking the gospel to Persia, they're not coupled up in the Bible and it's probable the Persian tale emerged after the two apostles had spent several centuries being celebrated together for no other reason than nobody knew anything about them and they were the last two on the team.

All that's in the Bible is their names. Saint Simon the Zealot we know almost nothing more than he has bequeathed us the term 'zealot' and 'zealous' slightly uncomfortable terms which speak of unhealthy obsession and blind adherence to an extreme. There's a bit more about Saint Jude Thaddeus (such as a second name), who may or may not be the writer of the letter that is the last book in the Bible before the Apocalypse swallows us whole into its end-days nightmare, and he may or may not have been Jesus's brother, however you want to understand that. He is also the patron saint of lost causes and thus without them even knowing it, is close to the heart of all those through the years picked tenth for the football team. In art, Jude is often pictured with a club, as he was beaten to death, and Simon with a saw, as legend says he met his end sawn in two. Nobody said Christianity was nice.

And that's it. There is absolutely no doubt that they were holy, saintly men worthy of the title Apostle, with interesting and inspirational lives behind them that we no longer know anything about. And yet it's almost impossible to escape the suspicion that the reason we remember them at all is that there had to be twelve in the list, and Simon and Jude are there to make up the numbers. So why are we here today, doing what we hardly ever do with any saint, and giving over an entire Sunday to celebrating them? Why? Because— you can't have a team that's all strikers. You need the mid-fielders, defenders, goalkeepers; you *need* team members number 10 and 11. That's enough of the football metaphors because although I've got away with it so far, if I push it any further you might realise that I'm faking it.

So, Simon and Jude, the makeweight saints. Without that filler it will never be whole. Unglamorous, unnoticed, unsung and absolutely essential. Here's the really interesting bit: that's the part of the whole that's closest to God. The ones the rest of us never notice. Not the A list or the B-list, those on the front pages and in the gossip magazines; rather, those that never make it anywhere near the list, that great mass whose only contact with the red carpet is cleaning it, whose only contact with the headlines is the ink smudges on their fingers when they're clearing the discarded newspapers from the train. The poor, the dispossessed, the displaced, the exploited,

the broken hearted, the bullied, the hated minority, the despised, the despairing, the neglected and the forgotten, the makeweights, the padding, the fillers. Those, in short, whose hearts, recognising their brother, leap when they hear Jesus say:

*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you*

It is the golden boys and girls that waltz off with all the glory in life. It is they who catch all our attention, draw our admiration, focus our aspiration. Fame and fortune, success and riches: such fripperies are human follies. They grab all our attention and God, God just doesn't notice. What matters to *him* are justice, mercy, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, and above all love.

Today we welcome Jack into Christ's church by baptism. He will, I am sure go on to great things in life. A-list material without a doubt. Whatever he goes on to do in his life, whether he's swaggering up the red carpet or sweeping it, what we are doing today in his baptism is helping to tip the balance of his life in favour of the things that God wants: justice, mercy, kindness, gentleness, love. Success or failure, fame or obscurity, first pick or number 10 on the team, if his life is rich with those he *will* go on to great things. And whatever else we do in our lives, if they are above all crowned with love, those great things wait for us too.