

THE APOSTLE'S SHIELDS



¹⁵ *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."*
Mark 16:15

The Great Commission: ¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but* some* doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28

Pastoral Reflection:

"But some* doubted" in Matthew 28:17 may also be translated as "Moreover, they doubted."*

This booklet helps us delve into the lives of the first 12 disciples – the Apostles, specifically chosen, mentored, and sent by Jesus. These are disciples who certainly worshiped and certainly doubted. Yet, when we hear "they worshiped Jesus, but some doubted" it sounds as though worship and doubt are opposites that cannot coexist. The Greek word *δέ*, meaning both "but" and "moreover," is a phrase that holds two things together – worship with doubt – without defining their relationship, and without specifying whether "they" (*οἱ, the disciples*) meant all or some.

In Scripture and throughout history, deeply faithful people have both worshiped Jesus and had doubts, questions, concerns, and even fear or shame. Martin Luther was certainly one of these: he suffered from *anfechtungen* or spiritual depression, worshipping God even while filled with painful doubt. Like the disciples, Luther confused God's transcendence with God's absence. Luther's *anfechtungen* mirrors words spoken by the father of a sick child in Mark 9:24: "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief."

What we know of the disciples is that they were imperfect even as they were called, taught, and loved by Jesus. Their serving and understanding were uneven yet yielded untold numbers of disciples around the world. What does it mean to be a disciple? It means being far from perfect, and yet following a Savior who perfectly understands our gifts and our limits, and still calls and claims us as his own.



St. Peter

Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30

Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you... And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Known as Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas (Rock), Peter had highs and lows as a follower of Jesus. Peter’s symbols are the “keys to the Kingdom” (Matthew 16:19) as well as the upside-down cross upon which he was martyred; after Peter was arrested he requested to be crucified with his head down. He didn’t believe he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.



St. Andrew

John 1:40-42

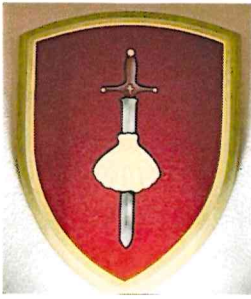
⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John [the Baptist] had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And Andrew brought Peter to Jesus.

Andrew was a fisherman who recognized Jesus at first sight; his symbol is often a fish. Next to his outspoken brother Peter, Andrew was not a dominant voice, yet he brought the faith to many people. He preached in Georgia, Istanbul, and Macedonia. In Patros, Greece, Andrew converted the Governor’s family to Christianity, and in retaliation the Governor sentenced Andrew to be martyred on a “saltire” or x-shaped cross. Andrew preached as he suffered for three days, and his dying words gave faith to many citizens and spectators there.

Why are these symbols tied to martyrdom rather than disciples’ positive actions? Romans 5:1-5 points us to the foundation of a life of faith – not happiness, courage, contentment, or fame, but rather:

Peace and Hope

⁵ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.



St. James the Elder/Greater

Matthew 17:1

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There Jesus was transfigured before them.

James and his brother, John, were often mentioned together as the passionate “Sons of Thunder.” James was part of Jesus’ inner circle, present at the raising of Jairus’ daughter and Jesus’ prayer of agony before Jesus’ arrest. James’ symbols are the shell, for his missionary zeal as he preached in Iberia (Spain), but also by the sword. James had returned to Israel to help the other apostles; he was killed by the sword (Acts 12:2) but his accuser, coming to faith, requested that he, himself, be killed by the sword beside James.



St. John

Matthew 20:22

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” James and John answered.

John and his brother James were described together as disciples; as Apostles, their paths were very different. John first traveled with Peter but then preached in Asia Minor (Turkey) and Rome. He escaped attempts to martyr him, including being forced to drink poison, thus the image of the snake in the chalice. John was the only apostle to live to old age and die naturally.



St. Philip

John 1:43-46

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave Bethany to go to Galilee. Finding Philip, Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph...” ⁴⁶ “Come and see,” said Philip.

Philip partnered with Nathaniel, also known as Bartholomew, throughout their missions. They preached in Greece, Syria, and Turkey, sharing miraculous healing and exceptional speaking. Philip’s ministry angered the Preconsul of Hierapolis, and both Bartholomew and Philip were ordered to be tortured and crucified. Philip, while being crucified, convinced the crowd and Preconsul to release Nathaniel. Philip’s sign is two loaves of bread, recalling his role in the miraculous

feeding of the multitudes, shown with a cross that reminds us of his persuasive ministry that pointed to Jesus in his words, “Come and see.”



St. James the Younger/Less

Matthew 27:55-56

⁵⁵ Many women were there [at the crucifixion], watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. ⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Two disciples were named James; unfortunately this James was the shorter or younger one, thus his label. He is the son of Alphaeus and Mary, and possibly a brother of Matthew or cousin of Jesus. Being that all we know of him was his relationships to family and his following Jesus, his life emphasizes the foundation of family for supporting discipleship, especially in challenging times. James was believed to have become, in Jerusalem, the first Bishop of the Christian Church. His death followed an argument with the religious community in Jerusalem, and his symbol is part of that story, as he was thrown from the Temple, stoned and clubbed to death, then dismembered by the saw.



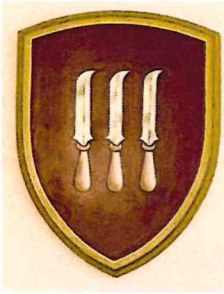
St. Thomas

John 14:3-6

Jesus said, ³ ... if I go [to my Father's house] and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I

am the way and the truth and the life."

Thomas is often known as "doubting Thomas" because he wanted to see the living Jesus and to touch his wounds, but in speaking aloud his doubt, Jesus gave to him faith. Thomas is willing to admit when he doesn't know or believe something, and in his wondering aloud, his confusion and vulnerability, Jesus responds with love. Thomas carried the message of Christ, not knowing where he was going but finding his way to the southeast tip of India. Thomas was killed by the spear - the very injury that he asked the Risen Christ to see - when his faith challenged the caste system. His shield shows the spear, but in front of it is the humble corner measuring tool of a builder, as he built the first Church in Babylon (Iraq) and Persia (Iran).



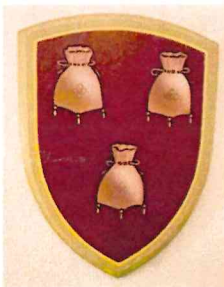
St. Bartholomew (St. Nathaniel)

John 1:45-49

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ... ⁴⁷ [After Philip told Nathaniel, “Come and see,”] when Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, Jesus said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” ⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Nathaniel is known as a thinker; sitting under a fig tree was the place of a philosopher. Nathaniel quickly recognizes in Jesus the fulfillment of the history and literature of the Hebrew people, and Nathaniel places himself as a disciple or follower by naming Jesus as his Teacher, or Rabbi. The full name Nathaniel Bar-Tolmei simply meant that Nathaniel was the son of Tolmei (“bar”= son of, Bar-Tolmei being written in English as Bartholomew). Nathaniel travelled into India, where he reportedly translated Matthew’s Gospel into the main local language, and served a Christian movement in Armenia, where a local king ordered him to be skinned alive, hence his shield bearing flaying knives.



St. Matthew

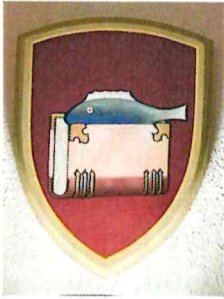
Matthew 9:9-12

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax

collectors and sinners?” ¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”

Matthew was a tax collector, despised for doing work that allowed extortion from Jewish people while funding the Roman oppressors. It was commonly thought that the disciple Matthew was also the author of the Gospel of Matthew; while that is viewed as unlikely, it is true that Matthew was the most educated of the Apostles and carried the Gospel to Egypt; the Quran, Islam’s holy book, refers to two “helpers” of Jesus who preached in Ethiopia and Quran scholars have named these Apostles as Matthew and Andrew. We do not know how Matthew died, though some colorful stories are told. His symbol here is three bags of coins,

showing that Jesus called and inspired even a tax collector to be transformed into a bearer of good news.



St. Simon (the Zealot)

Acts 1:12-14

[Immediately following Jesus' ascension into heaven,] ¹² ... the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Because Simon Peter and Simon shared a similar name, Simon was given a descriptor, in Hebrew קנאי *qanai*, which can be translated into Greek as *Kananaios*, zealous or righteous, and as *Kananites*, being from Cana of Galilee. Some disciples we know less about, and rely on historical hints or on tradition; Simon the Zealot is one of these. His travels, and his death, may have taken him as far as Britain or Suanir, Persia. Instead of a symbol of martyrdom, his symbol is a fish on a Bible. The fish is a sign of being an evangelist, a fisher of people, and the book represents his zeal for or loyalty to God's Word as it would be later written and collected.

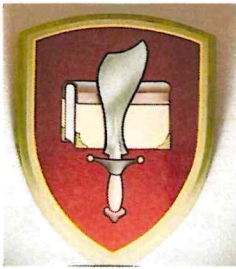


St. Jude Thaddeus

Jude 1:1-3

¹ Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, who are beloved in God the Father and kept safe for Jesus Christ: ² May mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance.

Jude was one of the more obscure of the twelve disciples, but in the early Church he likely wrote the very short, urgent book of Jude; in Catholic tradition he is the patron saint of lost causes – perhaps because of his healing of a sick king in his travels. He took the Gospel north to Edessa and is believed to have preached in Israel, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Armenia, and Turkey, often travelling with Simon the Zealot. Jude's symbol is the boat because of his missionary travels.



St. Matthias

Acts 1:23

[The early Church sought a new disciple to replace Judas Iscariot as the 12th Apostle.] ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Matthias as a disciple and Apostle has very little recorded history. We know far more about Judas Iscariot, not only his role as Jesus’ betrayer but also his inclusion by Jesus in the institution of the Lord’s Supper – a meal of forgiveness in which Judas is specifically mentioned as eating with Jesus. Matthias was put forward as a candidate to replace Judas; we do not know why casting lots was used, only that the early Church accepted Matthias into their leadership. His symbol is the Bible and the scimitar, as one tradition holds that he was beheaded for his preaching of the Gospel.

Why Shields?

As we have explored these symbols, we can see that the early Church was in a place of great vulnerability. Apostles were killed in the empires of Greece and Rome, by their own people in Israel, and in places as far from Jerusalem as Britain and India. Shields had two main purposes in the ancient and medieval world: protection and identity.

Shields as a means of protection were common; in the Bible, God is often referred to as a shield or protector. David, after he faced Goliath, sang of God being his shield – Consider these words from Psalm 18:

²² David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

² He said, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, ³my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. ⁴I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

Shields are also forms of artwork that declare one’s identity, as in a family crest. The shields in our worship space are a reminder that while the Apostles were not physically prevented from dying, they were confident in God even to the

end of their earthly lives. When Jesus walked this world with them, the disciples were often foolish, distracted, and reactive. But after the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles became bold, articulate, and hopeful as they brought the Gospel to many lands, cultures, and contexts.

As modern-day disciples here in the USA, few of us need to carry physical shields – and thank God for that! But we would be wise to regard God as our shield, trusting God far more than earthly tools. We may also consider what would decorate our own shield or crest that would tell about our sharing of the Gospel. The saying goes, “Some missionaries cross the ocean; some cross the street.” Our lives may look very different from the Twelve, but the Great Commission is still given to us: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

FOUR LISTS OF APOSTLES OF CHRIST in the order listed by the writers				
Matthew 10:2-4		Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:12-19	Acts 1:13
Simon	brothers	Simon	Simon	Peter
Andrew		James	Andrew	James
James	brothers	John	James	John
John		Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip		Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew		Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas		Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew		Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James son of Alphaeus		James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus		Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananaean		Simon the Cananaean	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
Judas Iscariot		Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

The APOSTLE'S SHIELDS were purchased from the memorial gifts given by the family and friends of C. Richard Carlson.

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