



A group of persons closely connected with Jesus appears repeatedly in the New Testament under the designation "His brethren" or the brethren of the Lord. Three such brethren are shown in the windows of our Church, Jude who was remembered last month, and now James Minor (James the Less) and Simon. They were three blood brothers, their mother was a sister of Mary the Mother of Jesus. The grouping of Jude, James, and Simon after the other Apostles seems to indicate some sort of special connection between these three. The word brethren in the Gospels is often loosely extended to all near, or even distant relatives - sisters also are often included. At least two of the brethren of Jesus were among the Apostles.

James Minor held a distinguished position in the early Christian community. According to tradition he was the first bishop of Jerusalem, and was present at the first council of the church at Jerusalem about the year 50 A.D. He has always been recognized as the author of the Epistle that bears his name. In the New Testament it is the first of the letters addressed to Christian communities, this one to Jewish Christians who had emigrated from Palestine and were living in Greco-Roman worlds. Basically it urges all Christians to keep the Faith even though they maybe living in a foreign or even hostile environment. The letter is an exhortation to practical Christian living. He is shown in this window holding a club, symbol of his martyrdom. He was beaten to death at Jerusalem about the year 62 A.D.

Simon was a relative of Jesus, possibly a first cousin. He is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew and was one of the 72 disciples sent out in pairs by Jesus. He is one of the brethren mentioned in Acts and was present at the Ascension and on Pentecost. He witnessed the martyrdom of James Minor and was chosen to succeed James as Bishop of Jerusalem. After the destruction of Jerusalem he led the Christians back to the city where he served for more than 40 years. During the persecutions of Trajan, he was arrested and martyred for being both Jewish and Christian. Legend has it that he was sawn in half, so he is often shown in art holding a saw.

The martyrs were the first saints and artists have represented them with the instruments of their deaths. Christian artists also devised the halo as a symbol for saintliness. Perhaps the halo, a circle of light, is the better symbol for us to reflect upon.

