

St Bartholomew

25 8 13

Almighty and everlasting God,
who gave your apostle Bartholomew grace
truly to believe and to preach your word:
grant that your Church
may love that word he believed
and may faithfully preach and receive the same.

My text may be found in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians chapter 4, verse 10:

'We are fools for the sake of Christ'

What do you think an apostle is ? Someone who knows Christ ? Someone informed and inspired by the Holy Spirit ? Someone who is sent by God to preach the love of God for Man through spreading the good news of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour ?

Literally, the word apostle means someone who is sent. The word disciple literally means someone who sits at their teacher's feet. Now those disciples have graduated and have gone out to share with others what they themselves have learnt, their experience of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Yesterday was the feast of St Bartholomew and today, in church, we remember the man in whose memory our church is dedicated. Sadly, in the synoptic gospels

and Acts, he is only mentioned by name once in each, and then only in a list, in the gospels next to his friend, Philip. In John's gospel, the name Bartholomew does not appear at all but we do have a friend of Philip's called Nathaniel who is mentioned twice. Once at the end of the gospel, Nathaniel of Cana, one of seven who were in the boat with Peter and John when they met a stranger on the shore who turns out to be the risen Lord Jesus. Once at the beginning of the gospel where his friend Philip introduced him to Jesus. It is a consensus among modern biblical scholars that Nathaniel and Bartholomew are one and the same person. The way we can resolve the problem is to see that Nathaniel (which means a gift of God) is Bartholomew's given name at his circumcision while Bartholomew is Nathaniel's surname or family name, i.e. Son of Tolmai.

So we have very little to go on which tells us about our patron saint. And the challenge for me when I came to write 'the Bartholomew Gospel' – which is now being published chapter by chapter in the St Bart's Monthly – was to discover and imagine what it might be have been like for Nathaniel Bartholomew to have been a disciple then apostle, to witness the events of the gospel and ultimately to lose his life for what he knew from the start to be true: that Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God. But this morning, in the verses, we have heard from Paul and the passage we have heard from Luke, we have an insight in what it meant in general for Bartholomew to have been first a disciple then an apostle. So let me highlight a little of what Paul and Luke have written.

First, our text from Paul: 'fools for the sake of Christ'. How odd – fools ! Not what a good Jew would aim to be or would want to be when wisdom is so highly

prized a virtue among them. But here Paul is challenging the accepted order of things. To be a fool for God is to overturn the usually accepted order of things, of putting self first. Paul is saying that putting others first is a cost worth paying: to be hungry and thirsty; poorly clothed, beaten and homeless; reviled, persecuted, slandered. And ultimately many of the apostles were martyred for what they believed and taught. But though the cost is great, what an apostle was to the people to whom he brought the faith was to be their father in Christ. Hence the courtesy title enjoyed by Catholic priests.

Then from today's gospel from Luke, let me focus on just one phrase, 'like one who serves' (22 v26). The disciples have been arguing about the pecking order among the Twelve, who is the most important among them, the dominant alpha male ! And Jesus gives them a different model of what it might mean to be a leader among men: to be their servant. It was a model he put into practice by washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. It was a model he put into practice by the lengths he went to in order to help others understand that God was reaching out to them in love. And the price he paid for challenging the old order of things was his death on the cross.

So if today you would like to know something of what it was like for Bartholomew to be an apostle, then the two phrases 'fool for Christ' and 'like one who serves' may give us an insight into their vocation. And the question, of course, that I want to leave with you is to what extent are we, are any of us, prepared to pay the price of following Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 28 : Bartholomew

