

'Fools for the sake of Christ'

30 8 15

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.

Our text may be found in today's reading from Paul's First Epistle to the church at Corinth – chapter 4 and verse 10. Paul, referring to himself and to all the other Apostles, with disarming candour and honesty says:

'We are fools for the sake of Christ'

When was the last time you made a fool of yourself? Me – when don't I? But what hurt the other day, made me cross, made me almost cry, was rubbing my clerical black Citroën C3 against the pillar of Résidence Victor Hugo as I tried to exit the parking having failed to give the pillar enough space – what a fool! So this morning, when we are celebrating St Bartholomew's Day, almost a week late, I'd like to ask the question, 'In what sense was Bartholomew a fool for God?'

We'll let's start by defining our terms and where better to look for a definition of the word 'fool' than in a two volume Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. There we read: 'fool' comes from the Old French 'fol' meaning 'mad' and from the Latin

'follis' which means bellows; inflated ball; and later came to mean 'a wind bag' – i.e. 'an empty-headed fellow'. Its prime meaning is 'one deficient in judgement or sense, a silly person, a simpleton'.

So is Paul simply saying that Apostles are silly, empty-headed windbags because of their calling to serve God by bringing folk the good news that Jesus is the Son of God our Saviour ? I don't really think Paul thought he or the other apostles were fools but rather that they might seem fools in other people's eyes because of what it cost them to do so. So this morning let's briefly look at Bartholomew and consider what it cost him to follow Jesus.

If tradition is correct, then Nathaniel Bartholomew of Cana came from a well-to-do, aristocratic family. So to follow Jesus, he was giving up his comfortable life in Cana to wander homeless around Galilee and Judea with Jesus.

If tradition is correct, after the Resurrection, Bartholomew travelled to Armenia where he spoke about Jesus as the Son of God, exorcised a demon-possessed daughter of king Polymius, disempowered the temple of Astaruth by exorcising its informing demon, Becher, and, for his pains, Bartholomew was martyred by being skinned alive by the king's brother, Astyages, who was also a king in his own right and a devoted follower of the disempowered deity, Astaruth.

From Biblical sources, we know little of Bartholomew other than his call in John chapter one; and his boat trip on the Sea of Galilee in John chapter 21 where seven disciples met the risen Lord on the shore and ate a breakfast cooked by

him. Bartholomew was one of the Twelve with all that entailed and as an Apostle, he received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. But we can only guess the pain and heart-ache it cost Bartholomew to face the opposition that Jesus faced, to witness his master's arrest and know his teacher had been crucified. But Bartholomew knew from the first time he met him face-to-face that Jesus was the Son of God, their long-expected Messiah, and Jesus promised him a vision of the angels ascending and descending the stairway to heaven.

So, if Bartholomew thought it worth being a fool for God by what he did and what it cost him to tell people about Jesus, can we say we're fools for Christ ? Today, with the rededication of our Alfred Oldknow Organ after its renovation by Andrew Cooper and Co of the Isle of Wight, we have witnessed the completion of our desire as Friends of St Bartholomew to finance the work to restore our organ at the cost of some 79,000€ of which we've raised around 60K. Which still leaves us with around another 20K to raise. Are we fools or are we, like our saint, following in the steps of the apostles whom Paul suggests are 'holy fools' rather than 'wholly foolish' ?

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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