

Bartholomew – by his example we are called to serve.

A Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity

aka the Feast of St Bartholomew 2014

Collect:

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Epistle is written in the seventh chapter of Paul's first letter of the to the Corinthians beginning at the 1st verse.

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

- ¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.
- ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.
- ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.
- ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
- ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
- ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.
- ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,
⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Here ended the Epistle

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as written in the 22nd Chapter of St Luke beginning at the 24th verse ...

Glory to you O Lord

Luke 22: 24-30

- ²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.
²⁵ But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors.
²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.
²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.
²⁸ 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials;
²⁹ and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom,
³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

According to a report published this week

"... the average Briton needs to take a holiday break every 56 days"

.... and holidays [*I'm led to believe*]
.... are a time to chill and relax
.... a time to break with routine
.... a time to do something different
.... to see things from a different perspective

And with that in mind
and this being the *"holiday Season"*

I thought we might *"have"* some of that [*this morning*]
[*and see what we can make of it*]

Link;

And remarkably the
"Lectionary authorised for use in the Church of England"
allows us to break out of the normal routine this morning
and do something a little unusual here today

.... and something which is a million miles
from mainstream Anglicanism

*[and you should have seen the look on their faces when I told them
that at 8.30]*

Move;

So this is where I begin;

We know the table conversation
we've just been part too *[in today's gospel]*
actually took place over supper
[.... that last supper in the upper room]

Within about 100 years of that exchange taking place
Christian people were honouring those same few apostles
*[plus a few others who'd more recently
made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of the Faith]*

These days *[according to Catholic Online]*
those select ***few*** have grown in number
[to more than 10,000]

and they are *[if you like]*
the ***"big cheeses"*** for many in the faith;

.... they are honoured by millions

.... if fact there's a longstanding tradition
where they've been adopted as special protectors
[or guardians over specific areas of life]

Brewers, cobblers, lost causes, motorists, students, virgins and wet
nurses all have them

Today our holiday diversion *[then]*

[and the more liberal evangelicals among you please forgive me]

.... today our holiday deviation

is to join with our Anglo Catholic brothers and sisters world wide
in celebrating the life of one of the Saints

Today *[then]* is set aside *[in the church lectionary]*

for the ***Feast of the Blessed St Bartholomew***

Today is where we look to the life of the ***Apostle Bartholomew***
for inspiration and spiritual direction in our lives

Shift;

Nothing too sacrilegious so far [I hope]

Today *[then]* we examine the life of Bartholomew

.... or rather we would do

we *would* do

if only we knew anything about him!

It's not-for-nothing that Bartholomew

is known as the ***"enigmatic Apostle"***

YES he makes it to the "A" team

[as one of the select 12 according to John]

and that *[as far as we can tell]*

that's just about the beginning and the ending to his story

Oh yes there're some who say he and Nathaniel might be one-and-the-same person

and there are others who suggest

he went and preached in Armenia

and was skinned alive and crucified upside down in Azerbaijan

*[which probably accounts for him being adopted
as the patron Saint of Tanners]*

but the truth is

.... the ***“real Bartholomew”*** has drifted into obscurity

The real Bartholomew is just like the guy who finished first
in the 1500 metres in Glasgow

and here we are three weeks later asking ourselves – WHO?

Bartholomew *[esteemed he might be]* – ***but [dot, dot, dot]***

so by my reckoning

his obscurity

makes him the ideal candidate to become;

the Patron Saint of “the Famous for 15 Minuter’s Club”!!!!

Gospel;

The real Bartholomew is *[for whatever reason]* hidden to us

So we must return to the last place where *[we “assume”]*
he was present

When we read from today's gospel
it is to know the scene was set in the Upper Room

it is to remember it was against the backdrop the Passover
which celebrates the Jews deliverance from slavery in Egypt

and it's also to appreciate that behind other closed doors
a plot was being hatched to arrest and kill Jesus

.... and this would be known to Jesus

That same night the course of history was to change for ever

.... he was to be betrayed –
arrested and deserted by his closest friends and followers

his right-hand man *[Peter]* would deny him

He would be falsely accused
beaten half to death
and nailed to the cross to die in agony

As they share the Passover meal Jesus gives to it ***new meaning***

As he tells his disciples that

the bread represents his broken body
and the wine his blood poured out
[something we shall re-enact together in a few minutes time in this service.]

The atmosphere is charged with emotion;

.... and what do the disciples
resort to in this most poignant of moments?....

Well they have a barney about status!
.... about which disciple is “*top dog*”

It starts with James and John egged on by their mother –
bickering and jostling for position
and before long they’re all at it
just like they do in the closing stages in the Tour de France

And we can only presume by this time Jesus is totally brassed off

.... and so he speaks to them about service

He says to them – “*tell me something*”;

“.... *and who is the greatest –
the one at the table -*

.... *or the one who serves?*

Is it **not** *the one at the table?*”

Then he turns this obvious fact totally on its head
by saying:

"... but I am with you as one who serves!"

and he **not** only speaks to them
but as we know from St John's gospel
he immediately demonstrate what this means
by choosing to wash his friends feet

Foot washing *[of course]* was nothing special in those days

Sandals and dusty roads make for dirty feet

It was all part-and-parcel of Jewish custom and etiquette
for guests to have their feet washed as they stepped
over the threshold

.... no-one would as much as bat an eyelid by that sort of incident

But *[this time round]* what made it different – *[even shocking]* –
was who it was that
that was doing *the washing*

It wasn't a house maid or the slave
it was ***none other than Jesus himself!!***

And we all know how the disciple's *[and Peter in particular]*
reacted to that

But that *[according to Jesus]* is the very nature of service

.... that is what good servants do

.... they just get on with it without causing a fuss

And unless something goes off the rails –
no one notices them or thinks to comment

And service is not defined by the sort of jobs a servant might do

.... it's not just about washing the feet or waiting on the table

A servant *[or a slave]* in biblical times
might well be responsible for
looking after the accounts or managing the business entirely

Just look at Joseph in Egypt
or the Ethiopian Eunuch *[mentioned in Acts 8]*
who's in charge of all the Queen of Ethiopia's treasure

Shift;

What defines a servant or a slave is who they are serving

.... it's their attentiveness
their responsiveness to the will of their master or mistress
.... the focus is on the one being served -
not the one serving

There's a great example of this in **Psalm 123** which tells us:

*"As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of the master
as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress
so our eyes look to the LORD our God"*

The servant is portrayed as
someone looking at the master's hand – ready – attentive –
waiting to respond at the slightest signal

It's about the whole ***focus of being***
the whole ***purpose of our lives***

It's not so much about what we do for the Food Bank
or visiting the sick
or spending time in prayer or
or being in-charge of some fancy organisation

.... that's not the point

.... it's about our attentiveness –
our responsiveness to the one we serve;

.... who calls us to make **HIM**
the focus of our being
so that attention is drawn to the **MASTER – not to us**

I remember at school
on numerous occasions
being told off
for the cardinal sin of

“drawing attention to oneself”

“100 lines Rowley

I must not draw attention to myself”

.... not that easy when I was the only ginger mop in the class

As we’ve seen
the servants job
is not to draw attention to themselves
but to their master or mistress

Think of this place in which we worship;

Yes we have a long list of priests at the back of this church
who’ve ministered here over the centuries

but the actual construction
the restorations
and all that goes into
supporting and maintaining this as a place of worship
for something like 900 years

was / is done by people whose names *[for the most part]*
we don’t know....

.... they remain hidden to us
.... but it is by ***their service*** – skill and attention to detail
which has left us with this wonderful church
we enjoy today

There are many Bartholomew's
whose hidden service
is at the heart of what it means to be a **disciple**
yet they remain unknown to us

Their lives were spent – are spent

not grabbing the headlines for themselves
but [*instead*] pointing to something
or rather someone else

.... someone far greater than themselves

.... it's about a life which draws attention **not** to ourselves –
but to Christ our Master

.... that he might be glorified,
long after we are forgotten

Such is the life of service

And to such a life we are called

Such is the ministry of **discipleship** [*Saints by any other name*]

Now go and enjoy the rest of your holiday season

In the name of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit **Amen**