

St James' Church, Weybridge

Bartholomew, Apostle 24.08.2025

1 Corinthians 4.5-19, Luke 22

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As it turns out, we actually know very little about Bartholomew, a Saint and Apostle of the Church. Lost in the midst of time, there is actually very little recorded about his role within the life of the early Church – he may well have travelled east as far as India, preaching and teaching the good news of Christ, on the way he may well have founded many Christian communities in Armenia and Azerbaijan, he may well have been brutally martyred at the end of the 1st Century, killed as a follower of Jesus ... but there is an obscurity to him, a lowliness, a humility – a life that was not measured by status but by quiet service in the name of God.

Quiet service is not the same as easy service, of course. We've already heard how Saint Paul describes the life of a disciple in his letter to the Corinthians – 'We have become like the rubbish of the world, he writes, the dregs of all things.' Dregs, Rubbish, some translations even use the word 'scum' here – not that I'm calling you all scum this morning, Saint Paul is – but his point, deep down, is that as followers of Christ, like him, like Bartholomew, rejection, confusion, out-right irritation may well come our way.

Our lives are to point to the unconditional love of God, a love that is, instead, embracing, comforting and out-right perfect – we're called to love like God loves us – when reviled, to bless, when persecuted, to endure, when slandered, to speak kindly, as Saint Paul also writes - to be faithful, to be generous, to be gentle in our quiet service in the name of our God.

Now for Bartholomew, and the rest of Jesus' first disciples, this was a lesson they notably received when an argument broke out after dinner. Our Gospel reading this morning takes us to this very moment, a dispute over who is greater, who deserves just that little bit more of the spotlight. But, poignantly, importantly, this argument takes place right after a meal, the very last meal in fact that Jesus shares with his disciples before his death - the meal, the supper, the Eucharist, where bread is broken and wine outpoured. It's stark that it's in this context where the argument breaks out – Jesus is literally giving himself away to death, to die for the sins of the world, and all the disciples seem to be seeking is status, prominence and influence.

But the table of the Lord is no such thing; it's never a place where hierarchy reigns or those supposedly more deserving sit extra close – it is a place of communion, of equality and grace – and just as Christ gives himself to us in bread and wine, his disciples – you, me, Bartholomew – we too must give ourselves out in service, and never in search of power. That's in part what we do here when we come to receive Christ, at this table, we receive him not in order to elevate ourselves, but to be transformed more into his likeness – to be sent out, to include, to welcome, to go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

I think it's clear that Bartholomew, and his fellow disciples, certainly took this message to heart. That's why by the time Saint Paul is writing to the Corinthians as we've seen, it's servant leadership that is the identity marker that defines the followers of Christ in the world.

And so, in a kinda roundabout way, it really doesn't matter then that most of the stories about Bartholomew we have are probably conjecture. What we know for certain about him is very minimal, but his very hiddenness is itself the reminder that the call to serve as Jesus' disciples is not meant to draw attention to us, but to bear witness to the God who comes among us, to love us and set us free.

The Church has been built on many a Bartholomew, and of all the Apostles, I think he's a pretty good model for us to find inspiration and encouragement from today. Whether it's the small ways we nurture and care for others, the gracious and faithful giving of money, of time, to our Church so that our witness in Weybridge can flourish, the gentle everyday acts of kindness that speak to the love of Christ for the world – we are each called to quiet service in the name of our God, for the building of his kingdom, and for the praise and glory of his name. Amen.

Revd Tom Musson, August 2025.