

St Bartholomew, 24 August 2025

Readings: Isaiah 43.8-13, Psalm 145.1-7, 1 Corinthians 4.9-15, Luke 22.24-30

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

Today the Church keeps the memory of St Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, whose name is recorded alongside those named in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Acts the Apostles the disciples are listed as follows excepting Judas Iscariot: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

His name is of Aramaic origin meaning "son of Talmai". Talmai is a Hebrew word meaning "furrow" or "abounding in furrows" leading to interpretations like "son of the furrow" or "son of the farmer". Interesting to me is that an Austrian Catholic newspaper reporting on church affairs nationally and globally gave itself the name Die Furche, The Furrow in 50s. We will return to this naming later.

As we know in ancient times people often had two names as in Simon who is renamed Peter, or Saul, who becomes Paul. Monks and nuns at their profession will take a new name signalling that in Christ they have become a new creation, as they dedicate their lives to God in a unique way in community and thereby identify with the charisma of the particular religious order they have been called into. I mention this because Bartholomew is often associated with Nathaniel, who is only mentioned in John's Gospel. On hearing that Philip has found the Messiah Nathaniel asks, What good can come out of Nazareth? After Jesus addresses him Nathaniel states, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' (John 1.49)

This morning I'm not going to pursue that possible linkage although it is a fruitful one, but rather proceed by bypassing the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles as they have little to say about his further activities, when we set John aside. According to Church Tradition however there is a rich seam to trace. The Tradition has it that Bartholomew travelled to India,

Armenia, and parts of Africa, preaching the gospel and establishing Christian communities. The cameo from Michelangelo's Last Judgement, depicted in a poor reproduction on your pew sheets, records the manner of his martyrdom. It was gruesome. He was flayed meaning skinned alive. All the Apostles according to Church Tradition gave their lives in the service of the Gospel including the Apostle who was untimely born, Paul. In Acts we hear Paul say,

"But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace."  
(Acts 20.24)

The Church's Tradition witnesses to the human opposition to the glad tidings of God's faithful ones as experienced from the outset and continues to this day. Anyone who knows me a little will also know that I am scandalised by how blind and how silent we have become as Christians and churches to the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the faith are undergoing. Scripture admonishes us as captured in the Book of Common Prayer to be said at the offertory, the collection, "While we have time, let us do good unto all men; and specialty unto them that are of the household of faith. Gal. vi."

The persecution of Christians is something, I find time and time again, not well covered by the media and even now I find myself choosing my words carefully. I can know if such and such a president wore a suit or not in the Oval Office, but to get a firmer grip on to what extent Christians are victims of violence, because they made the good confession is much harder to obtain through the usual news channels... Tertullian an early apologist will write in his defence of the Christians to Roman governors, "The more often we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed." (Apol. 50.13, original Latin: "Plures efficimur quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum.")

The readings set for St Bartholomew's Day remind us as Christians of the apostolic witness to which we are being called to submit ourselves to, as all who are desiring to become Christians are instructed to do. The apostles have a dispute amongst themselves about who is the greatest. It is a very human question to ask who is the greatest amongst us. It may be

a question we are prone to ask ourselves? By asking this question the apostles manifest to us for our sakes, for our learning that they haven't yet grasped that in Christ a new way of being and living is manifesting itself. Admittedly, not completely new because much is already to be found in the Hebrew faith.

By chance I picked up Friedrich Nietzsche's, *The Anti-Christ* written in 1985. Although short, its polemic is not always easy to follow. Perhaps reading it in an English translation might help? Nietzsche, a significant intellectual of the 19th century whose influence is still being felt today for better or for worse, was the son of a Protestant pastor who, I assume, will have known the Christian faith fairly well. I say fairly well because even if you have studied the Christian faith, practised it, lived it, it doesn't necessarily mean you have grasped it. When Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist, rails against the Christian faith, he does so from his Christian fundamentalist background, a caricature of the Christian faith, replacing it with a new certainty, his understanding of science, failing to acknowledge the transience of our scientific working models. Be that as it may Nietzsche's is an attack on what people in general in self-stylised civilised societies (with their posturing, with their Who is the greatest) still believe to be true, namely that we should have an eye for all those who cannot cope with life for whatever reasons. Nietzsche will have none of it. For him this is nonsense. The strong should be strong and have no inhibitions. The new human is the one who casts all the accumulated baggage of mercy and compassion aside and asserts him- or herself. This is his Übermensch. The one who stands over all. Such persons, he asserts, are to be celebrated. They should not be held back. We have been sold a ruse. He writes, just to give you a test for the thrust of his argument,

Die Schwachen und Mißratnen sollen zugrunde gene. Erster Satz *unser* Menschenliebe. Und man soll ihnen nicht dazu helfen. Was ist schlechter als irgend ein Laster? - Das Mitleiden mit allen Mißratnen und Schwachen: - das Christentum...

The weak and the failures should go to ruin. The first sentence of *our* love of humanity. And one should not help them. What is worse than any vice? To have compassion on the failures and the weak: - Christianity...

His final Schlachtruf in *The Anti-Christ* is telling as he calls for Eine "Umwertung aller Werte" - A "transvaluation of all values!" (Insel Taschenbuch, 1986, pp 12 & 126)

Someone who read this sermon in advance commented, "The Nietzsche quote in toto sounds like a manual for what was put into practice in the next century."

Today, Aurelia will be baptised into Christ, but before she can be baptised, be made a new creation by God's saving, reconciling and at 'oneing', it is necessary I ask both Aurelia's parents and the godparents, who are vouching for her today, as at every baptism a number of questions. One of these is "Do you submit to Christ as Lord?" The response is "I submit to Christ." And as I like to say to parents who present their babies and young children for baptism submit is a word we need to learn to appreciate, to own, to embrace and I think we can best do this if we break it down. To submit to Christ as Lord is to come to Him who is the way, the truth and the source of light and life of our own free will. It is to come under his sending. That is what submit means in this context. It is to come under the sending of God. It is a commitment. It is a way of life. All aspects of our lives are to come under his will for us, which we affirm to be good, life-giving and fulfilling and enabling us to flourish as those wonderfully made in his image and now more wonderfully members of the household of God in Christ Church.

Today we not only keep the memory of St Bartholomew, but we also celebrate with him as fellow members of the communion of saints all he stands for as one of first disciples and then apostles of Christ and for which he was prepared to die, if need be. We do not seek death, but life in its abundance. No Christian should wish to die, because life is a gift and the author of this gift is Christ. Ours is a life and witness until our final breath. In Christ, we who are gathered here, come to learn and know that this life is transitory, but each of us may plough a furrow. May the furrow we plough be one that leads to the living God. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6.10) **Amen.**

**Apostle you may recall means messenger. You will also remember that Gospel means glad tidings or more commonly good news. The message the apostles are commissioned to bring to the world is one of good news. Luke you will remember has the angels proclaim, angels also being God's messengers.**

...as captured in the Book of Common Prayer, "While we have time, let us do good unto all men; and **specialty** unto them that are of the household of faith. **Gal. vi.**"

Cannot check but looks a bit off: Gal.vi.x? especially?

The weak and the failed ones should go to ruin. The first sentence of *our* love of **neighbour**. And one should not help them. What is worst than any **addiction**? To have compassion on Suggest **humankind** and **vice** respectively

"Umwertung aller Werte" - A "Reversal of all virtues!"

Lit. A re-evaluation of all values.

NB The Nietzsche quote in toto sounds like a manual for what was put into practice in the next century. Will send separately a video of which this reminds me – nothing to do with the sermon i.e. not urgent.