

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus had twelve close disciples, but I daresay, most of us probably can't name them all. We would surely name Peter (everyone loves Peter). Surely, too, James and John. We might remember Matthew because he was a tax collector and because he wrote one of our Gospels. And probably Thomas, good ol' "doubting Thomas." Judas probably wouldn't come to mind immediately, but prompted, we would surely be able to name the betrayer. That's six of the twelve. Could you name more?

Indeed, were it not for the fact that today we are thinking on and remembering Bartholomew, one of Jesus' closest disciples and an apostle, one sent out with a commission, would you have thought of him? Or named him? Most of us, probably not.

That does not make him unimportant; only less known. In fact, who is Bartholomew? Let's explore that a bit.

Most scholars identify Bartholomew as the disciple who in the first chapter of John is called Nathanael. You'll recall that after Jesus' baptism, He called several of His disciples, Andrew and Peter and Philip. Andrew even said to Peter: "*We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)*" (John 1:41). Philip proceeded to seek out Nathanael and told him: "*We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*" (John 1:45).

Nathanael responded with a healthy dose of skepticism: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" But Jesus soon demonstrated to Nathanael that indeed there could, and Nathanael responded with praise: "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel*" (John 1:49)! Nathanael did follow Jesus, and did see even greater things, for at the end of John's Gospel, Nathanael is also there by the seashore to eat with the resurrected Jesus (John 21:2).

Yes, we hear of Nathanael in John's Gospel, but not Bartholomew. On the other hand, Bartholomew is named in the Synoptics, but not Nathanael. That, plus the fact that in the lists of the disciples in the Synoptic Gospels, Philip and Bartholomew are named together, causes scholars to identify Nathanael and Bartholomew — "meaning the son of Tolmai" (*Butler's Lives of the Saints*, III:391) — as the same person.

According to church history, after Christ's ascension, Bartholomew went forth, as did the other apostles, preaching the Gospel in far flung places: "Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt" and ultimately Armenia. He is the patron saint of Armenia.

Finally, it's reported that after "he had converted many people there to the faith he was flayed alive by the barbarians, and by command of [the king] fulfilled his

martyrdom by beheading ..." (*Butler's*, III:391). Thus, as I included on a bulletin insert, Bartholomew's apostolic shield has either one knife or three, depicting this fate, and artwork, like Michelangelo's "Last Judgement," has Bartholomew holding a knife and, grotesquely, his flayed skin.

As preached last Sunday, this is to be expected as Christians: suffering and cross, and yet, victory through it. *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it"* (Luke 9:23-24).

It was so for Paul: *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies."* It was so for Bartholomew ... in agony and pain. And, though surely not as horrific as for Bartholomew, it is so for us.

For Bartholomew, and Paul, and we all know that Jesus came as *"one who serves"*; and He served up this life for us sinners. For it seems that the twelve were always competing against one another, always wanting to be the greatest. It was so in our Gospel ... and this happening again on the very night when Jesus was betrayed. But as He had done before, Jesus set them straight: *"let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."*

Jesus had preached it of Himself before: *"The greatest among you shall be your servant"* (Matt. 23:11), and in today's Gospel He taught it to the disciples: *"I am among you as the one who serves."* Yes, Jesus had earlier taught them *"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28). And with Himself as the example, He taught the disciples: *"whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave"* (Matt. 20:26-27).

So, Bartholomew and the apostles went forth by Jesus' command, not as lords, but as ministers, as servants in the church, preaching the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the world's sin, proclaiming forgiveness and life through faith in Him, incorporating people into Christ's body, grafting them into His death, that they might also have resurrection and life, catechizing the faithful and serving them at the Lord's table with the body and blood of Jesus, the host of the meal.

Following in the apostles' footsteps, pastors still do this today at Jesus' calling — still "converting people to the faith," as the apostles did of old. Thus, today we still have preached the saving Gospel, as Paul and Barnabas preached — salvation through faith in Christ alone. We still are united with Jesus' death and resurrection by baptismal waters. Young and old alike are instructed in the faith, as Kelly and Steve have been and are ready to be welcomed into our fellowship. We're glad

they're joining us here at Zion and are joining us at this table Jesus sets for us. We're glad they want to live the life of the redeemed of Christ, a life of faith in God and service to neighbor.

To be sure, here in the United States, it's not likely that Christians — neither pastors nor laity — will be flayed alive or beheaded for their faith like Bartholomew was, but around the world pastors and faithful Christians continue to lose their lives for their confession of Jesus. It's not the kind of death we are looking for, but our promises certainly include the possibility: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" "I do," we answer, "by the grace of God," that is, with God's help. (LSB, Rite of Confirmation).

None of us knows what lies ahead. But we pray for our confirmands and ourselves that God would grant us stamina in the days ahead, that we may remain faithful to Christ and to the promises that we have made, that we may continue to confess Jesus before men, regardless what dangers lurk ahead, knowing that He will confess us before the Father in heaven, that at length we may sit down at the Lord's banquet table and eat and drink at the heavenly feast.

Until then, may the Lord strengthen us in our faith by this Word and the meal He sets before us today. May he strengthen us for service in His kingdom.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.