

August 20, 2023  
St. Bart's Sunday  
The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

Today we celebrate St. Bart's Day – the Feast of St. Bartholomew the Apostle, as it's officially known, is celebrated every year on August 24th

It's our namesake day

A little bit about saints – first, there are saints and then there are *saints*, you know what I mean?

In the Roman Church, faithful people who have accomplished great feats in their lives – often in the name of the church – are considered candidates for sainthood

And, it's believed that if you're truly a saint, your goodly deeds on earth gave you preferential seating in heaven which then is used for more good on earth

People in the Roman tradition pray to saints for miracles and for help – hoping that since they have this preferential seating they might be able to “bend the ear” of God on our behalf

The process of deciding if someone is truly a saint is called canonization and it often occurs many years after the person has died

So there are saints, and then there are *saints*

While the Anglican tradition split from the Roman Tradition some 500 years ago, we have retained many of the saints that by then had been canonized, like Bartholomew

And, our tradition also teaches that all of the baptized are saints – all of us are part of that beloved body of Christ as it says in Romans 12: “For as in

one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

Not all of us are fingers and not all of us are toes, but we are all the saintly body of Christ

And just as our communion with Christ exists beyond the bounds of this earth, so too our communion with the saints who have departed is not limited by the bounds of this earth

As we worship here this morning, we are held in the embrace of the communion of saints both the living and the dead.

Today, though, we are reminded of one of *those* saints, St. Bartholomew the Apostle, our namesake

I asked Elizabeth Ring why the Bishop back in 1973 named us St. Bartholomew – did he intend to bless us with a certain wisdom or identity by naming us St. Bartholomew? Did he foresee our role as Christians in Yarmouth as somehow related to the ministry and life of St. Bartholomew? What was the purpose in naming us after such a Saint?

And Elizabeth shared with me: “Bishop Wolf picked the name because we did not have a St Bartholomew’s in Maine. He was concerned that so many congregations had the same names and wanted to break that mold.”

To say I was deflated by this answer is an understatement, but I am also elated – perhaps Bishop Wolf knew we would indeed break the mold of what it means to be an Episcopal Church in Maine

Bartholomew is given not only the title of “Saint” but also the title of “The Apostle”

The term “Apostle” comes from a greek word that means “send forth” or “messenger”

The 12 Apostles were the first ones sent forth by Jesus as his messengers to spread the good news – Bartholomew is one of those first 12 along with Peter; James; John; Andrew; Philip; Judas Iscariot; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alpheus; Judas Thaddeus; and Simon Zelotes.

According to the early historians of the church, Bartholomew took the gospel, the good news, all the way to India

Other accounts have him evangelizing all over the Middle East all the way up to modern day Turkey

Bartholomew is credited with first bringing Christianity to Armenia and is therefore one of the patron saints of the country

For his dedication to the church and to Christ, Bartholomew was canonized before they even kept records of such things considering Bartholomew died around 71 AD before there even was a very organized church

One of the other markers of an apostle, or another way to define who was an apostle, was someone who had seen and experienced the risen Christ

So, for example, while Saint Paul isn't listed in the first group of 12 apostles sent out by Jesus, he is certainly recognized as an apostle because he saw the risen Christ and received a commissioning from Christ to go out and tell the good news, to be a messenger

The early church leaders felt like apostles needed to be able to speak from their personal experiences and not simply retell the stories of others – their testimony would be stronger if they could speak to what they had seen and experienced personally

And the spread of Christianity across the world is a testimony to the power of the witness of those apostles, including Bartholomew

Elizabeth in her email to me about us receiving our name from Bishop Wolf continued: “Bishop Wolf initially was skeptical about our planting, but he became very fond of us. It was his Archdeacon Harold Hopkins, “Hoppy,” who had the vision and persuaded Fred to give us a try. Hoppy subsequently became Bishop of North Dakota.”

The little engine that could, that’s us

Now, I don’t know if Jesus was skeptical about Bartholomew – I’m not sure how literally we can connect with the story of our namesake

But, I believe that there was wisdom in naming our community after an apostle

Remember, for some of the saints, their time on earth that demonstrated so wonderfully their faithfulness was in their care for others like Saint Teresa of Calcutta who we may remember as Mother Teresa, or for their care for animals and creation like Saint Francis of Assisi

Their deeds, so good, make it hard to believe we could ever be considered saints while in their company

For Bartholomew and Paul, their lives demonstrated faithfulness by being apostles, the ones who had seen the risen Christ and who went out as messengers to tell their story

And, last year, when the Vestry approved a new mission statement for our community, it included this line: “Building on the vision of those who established St. Bart’s 50 years ago, we continue to strengthen and grow our community by grounding our ministries in the love of Jesus Christ, *telling our story joyfully*, and caring for the needs of our congregation and the greater Yarmouth and surrounding communities”

Whether Bishop Wolf knew it or not, St. Bartholomews would be a community of apostles – those who have seen the risen Christ, who are sent out, and who are messengers, telling our story joyfully, the old old story of Jesus and his love

Unlike Bartholomew and the first disciples who became apostles, we may not have seen Jesus appear to us and show us his wounds, or like Thomas, get to touch his wounds

But, many of us have experienced the risen Christ around this table (the altar); or we've experienced the risen Christ in the gentleness and kindness of a neighbor; or we've experienced the risen Christ, like Mary talked about last week, when we have experienced radical love, or unending mercy, or unfounded forgiveness

Many of us have experienced the risen Christ in the care, nurture, and joy that is experienced within this community of saints

Many of us have seen the risen Christ in the wonder and glory of nature

WE have experienced the risen Christ, and we joyfully tell our story – we are apostles

We are aptly named – We are St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church

We love to tell our story – I love to tell our story, and you know I love to tell our story in song, and I know I've sung this song in a sermon before so let me sing the second verse:

I love to tell the story:  
how pleasant to repeat  
what seems, each time I tell it,  
more wonderfully sweet!  
I love to tell the story,

for some have never heard  
the message of salvation  
from God's own holy word

I love to tell the story;  
I'll sing this theme in glory  
and tell the old, old story  
of Jesus and his love.

Saints of God, apostles of Christ, beloved community of St. Bart's – a  
blessed namesake day to you all!

Amen.