

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 24 August 2025, Batholemew the Apostle

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

Almighty and everlasting God,
who gave to your apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach your word:
grant that your Church
may love that word which he believed
and may faithfully preach and receive the same;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Luke 22:24-30

Today's reflection is by Reader, Pete Gillions.

Life is difficult.

This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. ...

Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead, they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy. They voice their belief, noisily or subtly, that their difficulties represent a unique kind of affliction that should not be and that has somehow been especially visited upon them, or else upon their families, their tribe, their class, their nation, their race or even their species, and not upon others.

I know about this moaning because I have done my share.

Scott Peck *The Road less travelled*.

All of us from time to time find life can be very difficult. There is no doubt that today's gospel reading places Jesus at a particularly difficult time in His ministry. Jesus as they say walked this path before us and so can offer real assurance and hope to each of us whatever we face. To step into the story. We are coming to the climax of Luke's gospel and we find that Jesus and his disciples have arrived in Jerusalem. They arrive alongside many other pilgrims to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. The Feast of the Passover celebrates the Jewish people being dramatically rescued from slavery in Egypt and entering the promised land. It is the most defining moment in their history when their journey to freedom is re-enacted through a special meal.

But what happens next is something quite remarkable. What Jesus does with His disciples is take that meal and refocus it. Instead of it being a remembrance of liberation Moses brought now Jesus speaks of the bread and wine as pointing to the liberation that He will bring. A liberation that He will shortly achieve through His death

and resurrection. Jesus knows that dark clouds are gathering around Him and that He is entering the eye of the storm. He tells that His “blood will be poured out for them”, and that one of them will betray Him. But after a quick discussion amongst themselves about who that might be they then turn the discussion around. Instead of wondering who the betrayer might be they start arguing about which of them is the best. That is dispute we heard in our gospel reading.

It says “A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.” After listening to their quarrel Jesus brings a different perspective – true greatness He says is not seen in power and authority, rather it is to be seen in those who serve. At this point I want to stop and give a warning because it is so easy to go down the wrong track with this.

Reverend Timothy Lovejoy of the First Church of Springfield is the minister at the Church that Homer Simpson attends. Some of His musings have more than a grain of truth in them. The Rev Lovejoy is wondering why his congregation is getting smaller and asks himself. “Where else can people go to get to feel bad about themselves!” Preachers can easily misuse scripture to make people feel condemned that they do not do more. It is sometimes called the hardening of the ‘oughteries’ – You ought to be doing this, You ought to be doing that”. To simply read what Jesus is saying and apply it as a general instruction – that we all should be true servants of everyone is wrong. There is something different going on.

Jesus not only described what true greatness looks like, and what true greatness doesn't look like, he actually embodied it. His whole life redefined greatness. He asks the disciples “For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? The answer is obvious. Is it not the one who is at the table?” The one sat at the table is greater than the one who serves. But then Jesus states “But I am among you as one who serves.” “But I am among you as one who serves.” This turns on its head our notion of greatness. This radical idea that greatness is seen in willing service of others is at the very heart of the gospel. It is at the heart of the gospel because it was at the heart of Christ's ministry.

Paul writing to the Church in Philippi makes that same point, He asks them

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the

earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is a new way of living that comes from each of us knowing what God has done for us in Christ – How Christ took on the role of servant and was prepared even to die upon the cross. And that by doing so Christ is now exalted and death is defeated.

And it is that that changes how we view ourselves and how we view ourselves in relation to others. The truth is the old hierarchies are shown to be false by Christ. “But I am among you as one who serves.” And the more we know Christ for ourselves, of what Christ has done for us, the more we will respond by choosing to serve Him by serving others. It is a faith lived out in willing service, not acts of service done because we feel we ought. That's the important difference that following Jesus makes – seeing service not as a duty but as the path to life. As the Church prayer puts it “In whose service we find perfect freedom”.

Maybe, for you, life is particularly difficult or maybe things are just fine. But as we receive from His grace let's take a moment to thank God for all He has done. And maybe ask a dangerous question. Ask the “One who comes amongst us as one who serves” what He might be asking of us? That by His spirit leading His Church here at St James may grow in acts of service and so share His love.

Amen.

A word of prayer:

Jesus says

“But I am among you as one who serves.”

Help us to receive something of your life and love from you this day.

Amen.

