

A Sermon by the Reverend Canon Jack Nietert for the Feast of Saint Bartholomew on the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 22, 2010 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

## **Bartholomew**

I am experiencing great joy in coming here this morning. I have been involved in some minor way, shape, or form with St. Mark's since its inception. I used to recognize or know everyone associated with St. Mark's—today I don't. That is great news. I don't know all of you. It means St. Mark's is growing.

I really like your plan to grow—a total ministry model—the priesthood of all believers. The congregation is divided into six branches of ministry and each one can use his or her gifts accordingly. That's great! I believe St. Bartholomew would approve!

That brings me to Part 2 of this sermon. One of the last times I was here, Bob Hansel preached about St. James, one of the three James mentioned in the New Testament. And he spoke for about twelve minutes about James. He assigned me Bartholomew for today. I will now tell you everything there is to know about Bartholomew. His name is spelled B-A-R-T-H-O-L-O-M-E-W and he is on a list of apostles (sent ones) in Matthew, Mark and Luke. That is all there is to know factually about Bart.

If this sermon were to have a title I would call it: "The Significance of Insignificance".

Actually there are a few other things that could be mentioned about Bart. His name means son of tolmai— Bar-tolmai, Bartholomew. And there are some old stories about Bart. Some say he wrote a Gospel. It's lost today, but it may have been known to Jerome who was the author of the Vulgate Bible. Jerome translated the Hebrew and Greek Bible in Latin in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In another tradition, Bart went to India. Somewhere between 150 and 200 AD a visitor to India found the Gospel of Matthew translated into Hebrew—possibly left in India by Bartholomew. One other ancient tradition says he was flayed alive in Albanopolis in Armenia.

But that's it, folks—that's all we know about Bart.

Well, on to the significance of insignificance. Bartholomew was not the only apostle to live in relative obscurity, but he is a good example for us. He represents a quiet alternative to the more visible and vocal public witness we frequently associate with the apostles. Was Bart the thoughtful one—prone to process his faith internally without a big fuss? Jesus and later St. Paul reminded the faithful followers that all witnesses are necessary and helpful—the oldest and the youngest, the leader and servant—all body parts. Each is blessed in the telling of Christ's story among us. Now cowardice and timidity are not virtues by any means, but some gifts manifest themselves quietly.

How did you get here today? That any of us present here have a faith at all is probably due to the quiet scribes who copied the Scriptures from generation to generation. And due to the

quiet, thoughtful work of scholars, all of whom wrote and tended to and translated and interpreted the Story for us. That we are here is also due to the Communion of quiet saints who specifically helped form your faith. As I speak, think of two or three people who have been strong influences in your life as a growing Christian. Are they listed in the Lesser Feast and Fasts? Are they listed in the Who's Who in Christianity? Are they on our church's calendar? Did Bob Hansel pick one of yours for this preaching series? Probably not, but their insignificance is quite significant in your life.

One example is from history and from our church's calendar last week. Are any of you a nurse? Ever been in a hospital? Florence Nightingale is someone to thank for surviving your hospital visit. She was born in Florence, Italy, and studied nursing in Europe. Then she became the Superintendent of a hospital in London. She volunteered for duty during the Crimean War in 1854 and recruited 38 nurses to join her. Her quiet, behind the scenes work in field hospitals radically reduced the death toll and widespread infections then typical in field hospitals. She insisted on high standards of sanitation. After the war she went back to England and set up institutions for training nurses. She elevated nursing to a profession and devoted many years to Army sanitation reform and to the improvement to nursing and to public health in India. In addition to all that, she remained committed to a personal, mystical form of Christianity that sustained her through years of poor health. When she died at age 90, she had a reputation as a healer and holy person of mythical proportions. Aside from her skills as a nurse, she is remembered for her quiet, but great gift of administration. Behind the scenes, she changed nursing and hospitals and that quiet activity was significant.

The Gospel of John tells us the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus had been healing people and teaching and the day was coming to an end. Where would all those people find food to eat? When Jesus inquired about getting food for the people, Andrew said, "There's a boy here with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. But that is insignificant for so many." After the food was distributed and everyone ate, they had to gather up 12 basketfuls of leftovers!

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Anyone can be great. You don't need a PhD to be great. You don't need a great education or a lot of money. All you need to be great is a willingness to serve."

Are you willing to serve God and humankind? Our insignificance can be significant. Your ministry is significant. Thank you, Bartholomew, for being our example.