

St. Bartholomew and The COVID-19 Pandemic

"Saints reveal God's might. They show clearly and plainly in their lives, deeds, and their very being, that God lives," wrote Nathan Soderblom. Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael in the Gospel of John, is called a saint as well as an apostle and disciple of Jesus because in his faith, his preaching, and even in his death, he showed that God lives.

How might Bartholomew/Nathanael model God's power and might during this pandemic? The Prayer of the Day for St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24) gives us a clue:

Almighty and everlasting God, you gave your apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and courageously to preach your word. Grant that your church may proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship p. 57)

Grace to truly believe, courage to graciously preach the word of God, Jesus Christ. Even at risk of death. The story of his call is in the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 43 to 51. His friend Philip shares interesting news: he has found the long-expected, unexpectedly. Nathanael/Bartholomew is cynical, even closed by prejudice. "Can anything good come out of that town?" When Jesus uncovers something in Nathanael's identity, he reacts with suspicion: "How did you get to know me?" The answer proves that Jesus is who Philip says he is, and Nathanael believes. Jesus tells him his faith will be rewarded with eternal life. Bartholomew after Jesus' resurrection covers a lot of miles: he left tracks in North Africa, Armenia, India, and died on the coast of Ethiopia. Grace to truly believe and courage to graciously preach the word of God in Jesus Christ is what we need during the pandemic too.

As we make our way back to school amid rising case numbers, as we make our way back to church without clear regulations, as we go back into our work places, grocery stores, and daily life, we go with the model of Nathanael/Bartholomew: we grow out of our fears and prejudices into relationships, we move out of our cynicism into inquiring suspicion, and as Jesus leads us our suspicions turn into faith and our faith into hope and our hope into deeds of acceptance and kindness that show that God lives. May Bartholomew's example help us to be COVID-19 saints too.