

My name – is Bartholomew --- and I am one of the 12 Apostles called by Jesus Christ. I tell you that, because chances are you might not know much about me – and being an Apostle is my only claim to fame.

You see the only time I am mentioned by name in the Synoptic Gospels – that is the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke -- is in those lists of the Apostles, found in each of those Gospels – and that's it. No sayings attributed to me -- no mighty deeds, no inclusion in special events or happenings. Nothing.

Now the only time I am mentioned in St. John's Gospel – it is by a different name than Bartholomew – and it is far from a shining moment.

In John's Gospel, I am called Nathaniel [kind of like your man Jude is sometimes called Thaddeus] and I am a friend of Philip, and a follower of John the Baptist.

In fact, it is Philip who first encounters Jesus – and then comes to find me and says, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

And then I open my big mouth and say the less than flattering, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Talk about putting someone in a box! Kind of like you asking, "can anything good come out of Washington??"

But I go with Philip to meet this Jesus who says of me, "Here is a true Israelite – there is no duplicity in him." Which at the time meant, "here is a man who sees God, and who is without fault in his character."

Wow – what a compliment! I never knew I had it in me – *but he did*. See that was one of the great gifts of Jesus – he was able to look beyond all the boxes that everyone had ever put you in throughout your life-- and truly see you as you are: a child of God, created in God's image and likeness – loved beyond imaging -- who had unique gifts and talents just waiting to be put to good use.

And that's why it was so easy to follow him: which I did from that day on.

But enough about me. It's time to get to the reason for my visit. We, that is the 12 of us, were still rather green – we had not been following Jesus for very long. Oh we had heard him tell a few parables – like the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed -- and saw him cure a few people – like Jairus' daughter. But we were still learning --- and still trying to get over our fear such as we had in the boat as we were crossing the sea of Galilee. Still trying to trust this guy who wanted us to give up so much in order to follow him.

Then one day, right outside of Nazareth – he just tells us to go --- go do what you have seen me do: cast out unclean spirits, preach repentance, cure the sick, show compassion.

That was his gift of affirmation again at work – he knew we had it in us --- sure we may still be doubtful, and fearful, and still wondering what this was all about --- but he had faith in us, especially when we did not even have faith in ourselves.

And at least for me, since I can only speak for myself --- it made all the difference in my world knowing that I was being sent by Jesus:

that he trusted me enough to do this very important work of helping the kingdom of God grow from mustard seed to large tree. He trusted me – much like God trusted the prophets of old – sending them to prophesy to the people of Israel.

Whether I was successful or not – was not going to matter. Whether any demon or sick person even listening to me – was not going to matter. Jesus had confidence in me ---- so I was going to have confidence in myself. . .

And what happened? Well, lest I spoil the story – you will have to come back next week to hear the results!

But here is the message I came to deliver to each one of you --- Don't let anyone put you into a box – don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it – especially when it comes to sowing seeds of the Gospel. Jesus has faith in all of you – just like he had faith in me. And he sends you just as surely as he sent me.

Remember at your Baptism – you were anointed as a priest, a prophet, and a king.

You are called to allow the Holy Spirit to make you holy – so that you can infuse the world and those around you with holiness. That's being a priest.

You are called to announce the kingdom of God – by your words and actions. That's being a prophet. And you are called to be a good steward, a good caretaker, of yourself, your family and the gifts and talents and treasure God has entrusted to you. That's being a king.

And every time you attend Mass – you are SENT to go out into the world and share what you have learned and experienced right here in this place with others: “God in peace – proclaiming the good news of the Gospel.” Or “God in peace – glorifying the Lord by your life.”

That's a commissioning – a blessing to send you on mission --- just as surely as Jesus sent us out two by two--- long before the Mormons got that idea. . .

You can do it – you have it in you – each and every one of you – to walk away from your routine sins and doubts – to say no to the worship of consumerism and celebrity – to say goodbye to your indifferent life and your gray – lackluster – spiritual existence. You have the call to embrace in a very public way the truth that there is so much more to all of us.

Live beyond the box, do the unexpected – the heroic deed, take the unpopular stance, express the transcendent within you – and allow others to do the same.

I did it, with Jesus' encouragement, affirmation, and trust – and so can you.

By the way – it will cost you. It cost me my very life. After Jesus ascended to heaven – I went off to preach the good news of the Gospel in Lycaonia and Armenia – eventually making my way to India.

There I got on the wrong side of the powers to be – who had me skinned alive. That's why I am usually depicted in religious art holding a knife in one hand – and often my skin in the other.

But know that Jesus is always with you – even to the end of time.

By the way, don't forget to come back next week – to hear the outcome of our missionary journey!