

Learning from St Andrew

Isaiah 55:1-12; John 12:20-36

It was fun with the children earlier showing them the St Andrew window and looking at the different aspects of the story painted into the stained glass. But if I were to ask you – the grown-ups – what you remembered from what I told the children, or what you already know about St Andrew – I wonder what you would be able to say.

Most know Andrew as the quiet brother of Simon Peter, we presume he was younger though the Bible does not say. Perhaps you might know that he lived with his brother's family at Capernaum, in what may have been a little suburb of the bigger town, Bethsaida. 'Beth-saida' means 'house of fishing'.

The name 'Andrew is derived from the Greek word meaning 'courage', and the region of Galilee in which they lived had long had a majority population of Gentiles, or non-Jews. That's not without significance when you come to think about Jesus' ministry often extending beyond Jewish believers to those not of the Jewish faith. Andrew, however, was Jewish. Andrew is mentioned, and briefly at that, only four times in the New Testament.

Ironically Andrew was never chosen by the Scottish people as their patron saint, but was rather forced on them as part of a propaganda drive to enhance the prestige of the new bishopric of St Andrews, part of the Roman Catholic Church, which had begun to supersede the older Celtic Centres of Iona, Dunkeld and Abernethy.

Sadly the medieval legends about St Rule (or Regulus) being shipwrecked in St Andrew's bay and coming ashore with the relics of the martyred saint and burying them at the spot where the great medieval cathedral was to be built are probably just legend. In 832 AD Andrew is said to

have appeared in a vision to a Pictish king the night before a battle against the Northumbrians in what is now the village of Athelstaneford in East Lothian. On the day of the battle a saltire, an X-shaped cross, appeared in the sky above the battlefield and the Picts were victorious. The saltire was adopted around that time as the national flag.

St Andrew became the official patron saint of Scotland in 1320 at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scots' appeal to the Pope to assert Scotland as an independent country. As well as being our patron saint, Andrew is the patron saint of Greece, Russia, Romania and Barbados. His patronage also extends to fishermen, women wishing to becoming mothers, spinsters and old maids, singers and people with sore throats, and my favourite, he is the patron saint of gout sufferers.

I hope you've been paying attention; there will be a quiz afterwards.

I think it is ironically perfect that St Andrew, this quiet, helpful, faithful man, is located in our church behind a screen. Not for him the showy outbursts of Peter, his brother, nor even the close intimacy that John enjoyed with Jesus. I've always pictured Andrew as the strong but silent type, few words, yet in a sense more rock-like than his fiery brother. A good man to have about you in a crisis, sound and sensible and secure.

Even from the little we know of him from the Bible, St Andrew is the kind of practical, no-nonsense saint that suits a country like Scotland. No airs and graces, no pushing to the front of the queue no great drama, not even particularly good at talking about his faith. Just there, living it out, responding to the call, doing what he could when he could for the Lord he clearly loved.

For all his quietness, do not be fooled into thinking that St Andrew was some kind of lightweight follower. Look at what he left for his Lord – his living, his home, his family. Quietly determined yet making huge sacrifices. As national traits in Scotland go – Andrew would probably fit right in.

He was originally a follower of John the Baptist. Andrew was, before Jesus, a man of faith. But when Jesus came to be baptised, and Andrew saw and heard, he was not a man to hold on to the old ways simply out of nostalgia or laziness. He decided to follow Jesus, and wasted no time in telling the news about Who Jesus was and what He said. More than tell, Andrew goes and brings his brother Peter. I think Andrew's only recorded words are in John's gospel: "We have found the Messiah." If that's all you're going to say in the Bible – that's plenty. It makes Andrew the first Christian missionary, the first person we know of in history who brought another person to Jesus – in faith.

And today, in our reading from John, Andrew once more acts as the messenger, the bridge between people and Jesus. We read of Andrew, the Jew, bringing not other Jews but Greeks to Jesus. At this point nobody knew whether or not Jesus would welcome the Greeks, the non-Jews. But it is Andrew, remember his name means 'courage', who goes boldly to the Saviour and tells Jesus that the Greeks wish to see Him. Just as Andrew brought Peter to see Jesus, so now Andrew brings the Greeks, and the spreading of the good news crossing the boundary of Judaism and into the wider world. Ultimately – to us.

Andrew – the approachable apostle. Andrew, the apostle who issues invitations to come and see. 'Come and see' was what Jesus had said to Andrew by the Jordan, when Andrew was not sure Who Jesus was. Here, Andrew show that he has learned from Jesus. Jesus calls His followers to say to the people around them, 'Come and see.'

It doesn't have to be erudite sermons or moving prayers, or stirring music or beautiful buildings. All these may have their place in the economy of heaven. It starts, first, with invitation. Come and see. Come and hear. Come and experience. Come and meet.

Who?

Jesus.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent – a time of reflection about the relationship we have, weak or strong, clear or fuzzy, with Jesus of Nazareth. A time of reflection about the Word made Flesh, the One Who, in the nativity stories, comes to show us Who God is and what God is like. In amongst the commercialism of Black Friday, with its warped messages of selfishness and greed; in amongst the dark days of talk about air-strikes against Syria, and revenge against the terrorists and murderers bringing death to the innocent; in amongst our own doubts and worries and fears and apprehension; in amongst all of that today – St Andrew, coming towards us, and inviting us to ‘come and see’. Come and meet Jesus.

His window is just behind that wooden partition. But his message rings out still. In this day, with its decisions about the future of the Church here in Morningside; in this day when our minds may be on national and international news; in this day when we are only a few days away from World AIDS day and the on-going reality of that terrible disease, Andrew still speaks. ‘Come and see. Come and meet.’

Who?

Jesus. Of course.

And let Jesus transform your lives.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen