

St Andrew and Advent 1- 2020

“How beautiful the feet of those who bring good news!” In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate St Andrew and the First Sunday of Advent. As we enter Advent and begin preparing for the arrival of Jesus in our hearts, minds and lives at Christmas, as we make ourselves ready for ‘God with Us’, it seems to me a reflection on St Andrew is a very good place to start.

My hometown Parish has St Andrew as their patron saint, so St Andrew’s day holds very fond memories for me.

It has always seemed to me a wonderful patronage, for a number of reasons. St Andrew is someone who can unite us as Christians. He is the first apostle to be called and so understands our scepticism and nervousness in our own callings. And like us he is called in order that he can call others. Let’s unpack these a little.

Why would I say that St Andrew is someone who can unite us?

Well, he cuts through many of the divisions that so often divide us. He points us to the very beginning of the undivided church. He is the first disciple to be called and is there as Christ begins to form the band of brothers and sisters who become the early Church on earth, on which today’s worldwide Church is built. Today he is honoured in both East and West and of course, St Andrew is not only the patron saint of Scotland but also of Russia.

The Gospels tell us that St Andrew is the first of the disciples called by Jesus.

As he meets Jesus, God with Us, in the flesh, there is something about Jesus that captivates him. He is the first of the Disciples to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, along with the others, there are times when he misses the point or doesn't understand all that Jesus is doing and teaching. Jesus' way will have been strange, unfamiliar and new. As such, there will have been many times when he questioned, didn't understand, felt despondent or even sceptical. St Andrew was not called to something glamorous – no titles or great ambitious earthy estate. He was simply called to 'Follow Jesus', just as we all are, but with that comes great responsibility and ultimately personal sacrifice. The call to follow Jesus is a call to follow him in his way of life, in his obedience to the Father, in his trust of the Father. The call to discipleship is not a call to personal gain in an earthly sense; it isn't a call to happiness or comfort, quite the reverse – it is a call to take up your cross and follow him. It is in suffering and pain that we will find God most active. This assures us that everything that we go through, God understands, walks the journey with us and has an intimate knowledge of what we are going through. That after all is the essential message of Jesus on the Cross. St Andrew took that call quite literally, in the end being crucified on his own cross. His, like ours, is the call to share in the mission of Jesus: and that mission is to draw all people into a relationship with the Father. And whilst that mission is never easy, we can take great strength and comfort knowing that we are not alone in that struggle.

And St Andrew called more people to Jesus.

In today's reading from Matthew's Gospel, we heard of Andrew and Simon Peter leaving their fishing nets and following Jesus as he passed

by. (Matthew 4:18-22). In John's Gospel, it seems as though we hear a little more detail of the events that accompanied this. According to John, after Andrew had encountered Jesus, he called his brother Simon Peter and said, "We have found the Messiah". We are then told that 'He brought Simon to Jesus'. (John 1:41)

John's Gospel also tells us in Chapter 6, how Andrew brings the little boy with five loaves and two fishes to Jesus. After Jesus has told the disciples to find food for a crowd that was at least 5000 strong, and the others are standing around not knowing what to do, it is Andrew who says, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish". (John 6:8-13)

And in John 12, we hear of Andrew bringing the Greeks to Jesus. They wanted to see Jesus, but they weren't Jews and so they were nervous about approaching a Jewish rabbi. So they talk with Philip and Philip talks with Andrew, and Andrew tells Jesus. (John 12:22)

According to the tradition, after the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost, Andrew became a missionary and continued in his calling to draw people to Jesus. After the resurrection he preached in Scythia and Kiev (located in modern day Eastern Europe) and possibly in Novgorod (in modern day in Russia). He is also known to have preached in Thrace (in modern day Greece and Turkey) .

I often pray that I may have the courage and commitment in my calling to be as brave in my faith as St Andrew – that when the call comes, I will be willing to follow it, no matter where it leads. And you now what? That is my prayer for each of you too!

I pray that we will know ourselves as called by Jesus – beloved by him, chosen by him and called by him to share in his mission.

I pray that we will be people who bring others to know Jesus, to feel the love and compassion of God, and to bring those who are closest to us to Him – that, it seems to me, is often the hardest task.

As St Paul states: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” That is clearly describing St Andrew, and it may well be describing you too. I thank God for him, for his communion with us in the fellowship of the saints, for his obedience to Jesus’ call, for his passion for Jesus and for his willingness to give everything to follow him. I thank God that we can unite with him and all the saints through our prayer, through our being a part of the Body of Christ, the Church and through the Eucharistic feast in which we share. And finally, I thank God for each one of you. For your dedication, commitment and faith, for being the gospel bearers of today, the ones who bring the Good News, whom God calls and in and through whom God dwells.

“How beautiful the feet of those who bring good news”

Amen

R.T. Parker-McGee 2020

Based on themes in a talk from Malcom Rogers, A Sermon for St Andrew’s Day, 2018