

St Andrew the apostle. Patron saint both of Scotland and of Russia; the first because some of his bones were carried there by an early Christian missionary hoping to impress his listeners, the second because legend has it that he preached the gospel as far east and north as Kiev and the Volga river. The fisherman is also, unsurprisingly, the patron saint of fisherfolk, mariners and fishmongers, as well as ropemakers and, less obviously, of singers and performers. (Perhaps fitting that we should sing this morning, then/ I wonder if the choir knew that?)

Andrew's father was named John; we do not know his mother's name. Andrew's brother was, of course, Simon who was later called Peter. The whole family were fishers.

The Bible has two stories of how Andrew came to follow Jesus, and some traditions say that both are true with one following the other. In Matthew and Mark, we have a picture of Andrew with his brother Simon casting a net, fishing, and he called them to follow and learn how to fish for people.

In John's gospel, however, we learn that Andrew first followed that other famous early first century preacher, John the Baptist. It was John who pointed Jesus out to Andrew as the one who was to come, and Andrew and another disciple followed Jesus and learned from him that very day.

Now this is where the story gets interesting, for there are only three times in the Bible that Andrew is singled out, for unlike his brother Simon Peter, he tended not to be in the spotlight all that often. And this first time is when Andrew goes and finds his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus, with the words, "We have found the Messiah." No hesitation, no doubts; after that first day, Andrew knew who Jesus was, and his response was immediate; go and bring someone else to Jesus.

The second time Andrew is singled out is some months later. Jesus, surrounded by the twelve apostles, is teaching huge crowds of people in the Galilean countryside. And the disciples are looking at the sun and realizing that these people have been listening for hours and are likely getting hungry, and they warn Jesus that he ought to send them home for dinner. Instead, Jesus insists that the disciples feed them. While the other eleven are busy arguing that this would be impossible, that the amount of money it would take to feed this crowd would be more than they could earn in a year, Andrew quietly brings forward a small boy to Jesus, a boy who has offered to share his lunch of two fish and five loaves of bread with all the people gathered there. To be sure, Andrew adds, "but what is that among so many people?" Still, he has enough faith in Christ's power that he does bring the boy to Jesus, and he does take the risk of looking ridiculous. I mean, it's one thing for a child to come forward and naively make

the offer; but for Andrew to bring the gift to Jesus, knowing that it couldn't possibly make a difference; that is something else again. Still, he does it. And of course, Jesus takes the loaves and the fishes and feeds thousands of people with it.

The third time we hear of Andrew is in the final days of Jesus's earthly life. They are in Jerusalem, preparing to celebrate the great feast of Passover, and the city is swarming with foreigners, pilgrims and tourists alike, for the holiday. And among the crowd are some Greeks who hear about this Jesus and approach Andrew and Philip, one of the other apostles, and together they bring these foreigners to Jesus. Somehow, the fact that these non-Jews were seeking out Jesus as the holiest day of the Jewish calendar was approaching was something that Andrew was able to accept and indeed, to embrace; that they were different didn't matter, for they wanted to see Jesus.

The Bible is silent as to what happened to Andrew after the feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus died and rose again. Legends abound; as I mentioned, some say that he preached in Russia; others have him travelling to the Greek city of Patras to preach. It was in Patras that Andrew was martyred for his faith. When his imperial captors sentenced him to death by crucifixion, tradition says that Andrew requested that he be hung on a cross in the shape of an X rather than the T-shape on which Jesus died. Andrew, you see, did not believe that he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

But I want to return to the example Andrew leaves for us in the gospels. All three times he is remembered there, it is because he has brought someone else to see Jesus. First, his brother Simon; then, a small boy; and finally, some Gentile visitors. Bringing them all to Jesus, so that they can meet him, so that they can learn from him, so that they can participate and become a part of his mission of love to the world. And after Pentecost, all the traditions agree that Andrew spent the rest of his life telling others about Jesus, bringing them to Christ however he could.

I do not know, nor have I read, why the founders of this parish chose to name it for Saint Andrew fifty-two years ago. But I do believe that the choice was providential, that God had a hand to play in it. For I believe that the mission of this parish, the calling to each member of this church, is that call that Andrew answered. It is a calling to bring others to Christ.

In this post-Christendom era, that pesky e-word makes many folks uncomfortable. I had a conversation yesterday at the bazaar with a woman who recently retired as a program director for a nursing home, where she sometimes had to fight to allow Christian ministers into the facility, for there was a great fear there that someone would come in a try to proselytise or evangelize the residents. (oops, there I went and said it, didn't I? The e-word. Evangelism.)

But there it is. See, my daughter is active in Brownies and has a lot of fun at it, and last month she invited her friend Jenna to come to Brownies with her, and Jenna tried it out and she was enrolled as a Brownie two weeks ago. A friend of mine loves movies, and when he's found a great one he'll invite friends to come along with him to watch the movie, because he wants to share it with them. I have another friend who's a great wine aficionado, and Walter holds semi-regular wine-tasting parties so that he can share the treasures he has found with friends and family.

We all do that, don't we; when we find something we really like, we share it with others. We become evangelists; bringers of good news. Yet when it comes to being capital E evangelists, bearers of the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ, so many of us hesitate. Do we fear to offend someone else by saying what we believe? Are we worried that they might somehow think less of us if they know that we are active Christians? Are we concerned with the stereotype of the evangelical Christian, that others may think us to be too narrow, restricted, conservative or fundamentalist in our outlook on the world? Are we ashamed of what we believe?

I don't know what it is that makes so many of us shy away from the call to bring others to Jesus. But as we celebrate our patronal festival today, perhaps it is appropriate to think about it. Our baptismal covenant calls us to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ. It doesn't have to be pushy or in your face; it wasn't for Andrew. Instead, it is about constantly living our lives in such a way that people see us, and wonder why we are so full of compassion, or joy, or love, or hope. It is about speaking of our faith, offering to pray for someone going through a tough time in their life, or speaking of the church activity we attended over the weekend.

It is about following the example of Andrew, as we with him follow Christ and truly learn to fish for people. Amen.