

Scripture: Isaiah 64: 1-9 / John 1: 35-42

Text: *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah'.....and he brought him to Jesus* (John 1: 41, 42a)

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN**

The London visit is always regarded as one of the highlights of the Moderator's year so it is a great pleasure to be with you today and to bring you the greetings, the prayers and the good wishes of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

And it is a particular pleasure to join you on the 30th November.....St Andrew's Day .....although if the truth be told, we don't really *do saints* in the Church of Scotland.

Of course we willingly affirm our belief in the communion of saints, the fellowship and faith we share with Christian people in heaven and on earth, but saints are conspicuous by their absence in the worship and traditions of Presbyterian Scotland.

So what of St Andrew?

Andrew was one of Jesus' first disciples but if Matthew, Mark and Luke are to be believed, their meeting was something of an accident.

In their record of events Jesus was teaching on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee but such was the crush of the crowd, he commandeered a fishing boat .....and it so happened to be the boat belonging to Andrew and his brother, Simon Peter.

John's account not only adds a little more detail but also gives a degree of credibility to the apparently spontaneous decision of the fishermen to leave their nets and follow Jesus.

From John's account we learn meetings and conversations had already taken place, and, if Andrew didn't know everything about Jesus, what he knew was enough to persuade him to accept Christ's invitation to follow.

Whatever the paucity of the Biblical details, it is more than compensated for by the legends that have grown up around St Andrew.

Tradition suggests that he preached in the area of the Black Sea.

It is also claimed that not wanting to be executed on a similar shaped cross to his Lord, Andrew was crucified on an X shaped cross in the Greek town of Patras.

The connection with Scotland is through a Greek monk called St Rule (or St Regulus) who was commanded in a vision to take a few relics of Andrew to the far ends of the earth for safe keeping – and from St Rule's perspective what could be further than the east coast of Scotland?

The first time Andrew was recognized as the patron saint of Scotland was in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320) and during medieval times the town of St Andrews became a popular pilgrimage destination.

With the relics brought by St Rule – a tooth, kneecap and bones from an arm and finger – being destroyed during the turbulent years of the Reformation, further relics were gifted to Scotland towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Archbishop of Amalfi and later (1967) by Pope Paul VI.

These relics are kept in Edinburgh's St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral.

Now if the mention of relics has just raised your Presbyterian hackles, let me suggest other and better reasons to celebrate the fisherman disciple.

Did you know Andrew is not his real name?

Andrew is taken from the Greek *Andreas* which itself is derived from *aner* (man) or *andros* (of a man) and *Andreas* was probably a nickname or translation of the Hebrew.

Paradoxically I find it is this very lack of detail, the sketchiness of the Biblical record, the fact we don't even know his original name, which makes Andrew such an appealing character.

Have you noticed Andrew is rarely mentioned in his own right but typically as Simon Peter's brother?

And although he could lay claim to having been the first disciple, Andrew was never one of Jesus' inner core of disciples.

When Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, or went up the Mount of Transfiguration, or withdrew in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was Simon Peter, James and John whom he took with him and not Andrew.

Did Andrew ever resent this?

Hadn't he been the one who had actually introduced his brother to Jesus?

Do you suppose he ever felt hurt at being over-looked in this way?

If Andrew did feel hurt and overlooked, it never manifests itself in the gospel record.

Indeed the picture which emerges is of a man who did not seek centre stage but was quite content to stand back and let his brother enjoy the limelight.

The humility so evident in Andrew's nature lies at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Andrew was not concerned with precedence or place; rather his motivation was to follow Christ and do whatever he could to help.

It is a humility and motivation evident in John's later account of Jesus feeding the five thousand.

As Philip fussed over how the disciples were ever going to find the money to buy enough bread for people to eat, it was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who had the wit not only to notice the boy with the loaves and the fish but to take him to Jesus.

Did Andrew know what would happen next?

Of course he didn't – and that is just the point – rather than shrugging his shoulders and saying the situation was hopeless, he did what he could do to help – and trusted Jesus to do the rest.

Then or now, humility lies at the heart of discipleship, a willingness to do whatever you can to help, not because it will draw attention and make people take notice of you, but because what matters is making the most of the opportunity presented, doing whatever you can to meet someone's need, listen to their concern or ease their path – and then to trust Christ will do the rest.

This commentator put it well when he wrote;

*Andrew is the patron saint of all who humbly and loyally and ungrudgingly take the second place.<sup>1</sup>*

Then or now humility lies at the heart of discipleship and with it an acceptance that there is much we don't understand about our faith.

Often we are not sure about God's presence and promise in our lives or God's purpose in our world – yet we dare to believe that in the end the purpose of God's love will prevail.

It would not be difficult to look around our world today and become disillusioned about the prospects for humanity.

From ceaseless conflict to acts of terrorism, from outbreaks of disease to grinding poverty, to extraordinary political movements, there is good cause to despair.

Andrew's world gave him good cause to despair too.

He lived in an occupied country, one dominated by Roman rule, with Israel's future anyone's guess and the fate of God's people anything but certain.

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay *The Daily Study Bible : The Gospel of John* Volume 1, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1961, p73

Yet Andrew did not despair, neither did he lose hope, because even at a time when people had lost their way with God, Andrew trusted God had not lost God's way with them and the day would come when God would do a new thing.

*Come with me, he said to his brother, I think we have found the Messiah.*

The 30<sup>th</sup> November, St Andrew's Day, and if the irony is we know so little about him, not even his real name, many good reasons remain to celebrate Jesus' fisherman disciple and Scotland's patron saint for this is his legacy – the hallowing of humility, the triumph of hope over despair, and the faith that even with the little we are able to do and offer, God's love will prevail and God will set things right.

***Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen***