

**SERMON PREPARED BY THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW, LOCUM TENENS FOR ST
ANDREW'S DAY, SUNDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2017**

I wonder how difficult it is to be a player of a viola in a symphony orchestra. A violist seems always to be destined to play as “second fiddle” to the violinists – always in the background, always creating the harmony against which the violinists can play their music ... play the main themes and melodies ... and receive the accolades. I think that the Apostle St Andrew may have felt like this – he seemed destined to play “second fiddle” to his brother Simon Peter – always in the background, creating the harmony against which Peter lived his life as one of the “inner circle” of disciples along the James and John.

Andrew was the first-called of all the disciples of Jesus, and it was Andrew who went and brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. These two were professional fishermen. In the gospel of John (1:35-42) we are told that Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and was pointed to Jesus by his first leader. Although outshone by his brother Peter, Andrew had some moments of his own importance in Jesus' ministry. It was Andrew who told Jesus about the boy with the loaves and fishes (John 6:8) that led to the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. When Philip wanted to tell Jesus about certain Gentiles who were wanting to speak with him, it was Andrew to whom Philip brought the request from these non-Jews. Andrew was present at the Last Supper. However, on the whole, Andrew played a subservient role to his brother Peter.

Andrew seems to have been content to accept that he was to play the viola, not the violin ... he was to play a lesser role than Peter James and John. And yet, that “lesser role” so far as our human judgement is concerned, was a very important role so far as Jesus' ministry was concerned. Andrew seems to have been a “facilitator” for others – a facilitator for the miracle Jesus performed with the bread and fish ... a facilitator for the Gentiles who came seeking Jesus. It may not be too much to say that Andrew was the facilitator for the old Simeon's words in what we Anglicans call the *Nunc Dimittis*. When the baby Jesus was taken to the temple by his parents, and was held by old Simeon, that aged man said that Jesus would be God's “light to lighten the Gentiles.” And as Andrew acted as the go-between for the Gentiles who sought Jesus, these words of Simeon were fulfilled.

Not all of us are called to have leading, public roles in God's work. Not all of us are called to “play violin.” But the roles that we do have are just as important as the roles played by the public figures. We may not preach sermons, but we do read the Bible or lead the intercession at church. We facilitate the liturgy by these important functions. You may not preach sermons, read the Bible or lead the intercessions, but you may be welcomers and stewards here at church. You are the people who are the “welcoming face” of the church for those who come to worship ... the regular members of the congregation as well as the occasional visitor or the newcomer. You are those by whose friendly and welcoming faces and attitudes people make their initial opinions about the nature of the whole congregation. You may be among the many whose gifts and role are to pray for the life of the parish ... to help provide the spiritual grace and “grunt” of the parish. There can be no greater role in God's work than to be a pray-er.

Those who stand in the sandals of St Andrew as “second-fiddle players” have very important roles to play. Let us play those roles faithfully and as well as we can.

But there is more to say about St Andrew. Tradition has it that after Jesus' ascension, St Andrew preached along the Black Sea as far as Kiev in The Ukraine and as far as Novgorod. So he became the patron Saint of Ukraine, Russia and Romania. Another tradition tells that St Andrew's relics were brought from Constantinople to the place where the modern Scottish town of St Andrews stands today. The Scottish flag has on it the X-shaped cross or the saltire. This was the shape of the cross on which St Andrew was crucified in Achaea, in Northern Greece. It's interesting that both brothers – Andrew and Simon Peter – were crucified as was their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

While Simon Peter was busy with his ongoing ministry in Palestine, Andrew – according to tradition – had his own busy ministry in these different parts of the world. It's important to realise that doors we may have regarded as being shut to us, can be opened to us, and we can have a Christian ministry that we didn't think we ever could. During Jesus' life Andrew must have accepted that the role he had was the role he would always have. But not so in the economy of God.

We need to keep our eyes always open to the opportunities for service that may come to us unexpectedly, almost inexplicably. Those opportunities may be only short term – and could almost be “occasions” of service and ministry rather than ongoing, long-term service and ministry. And yet there they are, put in our way by God. Maybe we can be letter writers to people who need encouragement. Have you ever thought about the rarity these days of hand-written letters, and the special nature of those sorts of letters when we receive them? Then perhaps **our** hand-written letters of thanks or encouragement to others may be important affirmations for them. People with a practical or craft-based bent may well find a way to use those gifts and talents for others. There is a small group I have come across of ladies who are knitters and sewers, who make soft dolls and toys to be distributed by Anglicare to needy children. That's a practical ministry of love and talent-use, able to benefit others.

We could mistakenly feel sorry for Andrew as we see him in our mind's eye playing second-fiddle to Peter. Rather we ought to feel inspired and encouraged by St Andrew, who facilitated parts of the ministry of Jesus that were very important, and who branched out into his own areas of ministry. Let us thank God that our parish church has been named after this disciple of Jesus, and let us determine that we shall follow Andrew's example of faithful facilitating and faithful new areas of ministry.