

Andrew, Apostle & Martyr / First Sunday of Advent  
Year B - 29/11/2020

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Psalm 19:1-6

Romans 10:8-18

Matthew 4:18-22

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

Advent, which begins this morning, is a time of waiting and preparation. And one of the ways in which we do this each year in the church is that we tell the story of the coming of Christ. We return again and again to the young Virgin Mary entering the temple in preparation to become the God-bearer. We recount the unique roles of St. Joseph the Betrothed, the lowly shepherds, and the Gentile wise men in relation to Christ's birth.

We remember the Hebrew prophets who foretold and prepared the way for Him, culminating with St. John the Baptist and Forerunner. Even though we know the story quite well, the point is not simply to remind ourselves of historical details.

Rather, Advent focuses on how we might prepare ourselves for the great encounter each of us is called to have with Christ. The Lord is coming – that's what Advent literally means – and we are invited in this preparatory season to make our hearts and minds and homes ready to meet him. We are also called, as our Archbishop helpfully reminds us in the Diocesan Vision, to bring others to meet Christ.

Perhaps more than any other Biblical figure, St. Andrew the Apostle, whom the Church universal celebrates today, demonstrates for us how this is done.

St. Andrew was one of two disciples who were followers of John the Baptist. John, while baptizing, saw Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard this, they began to follow Jesus.

Andrew then told his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah,” and led Simon to Jesus. Thus, Andrew has been often referred to as “The Introducer.”

St. Andrew is also seen to act in this manner when Jesus was on the hillside preaching to the people. When Jesus saw the great crowd, he asked Phillip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Phillip said, “Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” Andrew, however, responded, with another invitation: “Here is a boy, with five small barley loaves and two small fish.” It proved to be sufficient to feed all present.

Of course, we do not only simply remember and celebrate the feast of Andrew today, but we are challenged by the call of God upon our own lives. And so today is an opportunity to reflect on how we might be more like Andrew and the other disciples.

So, we are called to speak of Christ - of the remarkable story of grace and mercy that has captured us and led us to this place, with words of honesty and sincerity.

But it is not only by our words that we bring people to know Christ. In our reaching out to others, including those in need, it is by our actions that we can make Christ known. The work performed in mission in Christ’s name by the church has been a hallmark of its life in years’ past, and continues to be an authentic witness today.

The five marks of mission of the Anglican Communion encourage us to hear God’s call and to share in God’s mission; they call us to be good stewards of all that we have that we may protect this fragile planet; they ask us to seek the empowering nature of God that we might work for peace and justice and turn away from violence; they challenge us to be a church with open doors, open hearts and open minds, and they remind us that we are called to meet human need through loving service.

It's a part of what Bishop Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States calls "the Jesus Movement". It's a movement that began that day at the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called Andrew, and it continues today. It's a movement comprised of people who are willing to take a crazy risk and follow Christ on the path of love and justice and peace. It's a movement made up of people who are ready to answer the call of discipleship, to leave their nets behind and carry the gospel to a world in need. This is the Jesus movement, and we are all invited to join.

If, like St. Andrew, we want to play our unique role in the salvation of the world, it is helpful for us to take heed of this coming season; to embrace the spiritual disciplines of this Advent season with faith, humility, and repentance. In order to become credible living icons of His salvation, we must prepare ourselves - prepare ourselves to be healed and transformed in holiness as the unique people we are.

There are surely times in our lives when to think of ourselves as holy is almost laughable. And yet, we bear within us, that seed of Christ's holiness, planted within us at our birth, nourished by the Holy Spirit at Baptism, fed and watered by God's Holy Word, and called forth from us as we share in the sacramental life of the church.

(and so it is particularly poignant for us to celebrate this morning the baptism of Davies and Wardah - two of our fine young children in this parish as they come to be baptized. Because they are old enough, they will join with their parents and godparents in making the promises that are part of this service; and so they will echo Andrew's response to Jesus as they commit themselves to following him, and turning away from evil and darkness.)

Today we commit ourselves to enter fully into this Advent season, and to continue the work of the Jesus movement that is before us, and we pray - we pray that God's Spirit would enliven, strengthen, unsettle, and disturb us, and that we, like St. Andrew, would respond.

Let us pray

Christ, whose insistent call disturbs our settled lives: give us discernment to hear your word, grace to relinquish our tasks, and courage to follow empty-handed wherever you may lead, so that the voice of your gospel may reach to the ends of the earth. Amen