

Feast of St. Andrew

Matthew 4:18-22, Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Romans 10:8b-18

St. Paul's, Concord, November 24 & 25, 2018

Preacher: Michael Atkinson

Today we're celebrating the Feast of St. Andrew – a little early, because the actual date is November 30th. Next weekend would have been closer, but by then we're into Advent, so Andrew gets his day today. Most of you, certainly those with Scottish ancestry, know that Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, and I'll come back to that a little later.

I've often thought that Andrew doesn't get the credit or the exposure in the Bible that he deserves. He's only mentioned a handful of times, and most of those are only when he's included in a list of Jesus' disciples. But he was part of a pivotal moment at the beginning of Jesus' ministry that may well have made all the difference to the church today.

In Matthew's gospel we have to be content with a very brief account of Andrew and Peter being called away from their trade as fishermen to follow Jesus and become fishers of people. We have to turn to John's account to find out that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, who became intrigued by Jesus when John pointed him out as the "Lamb of God" (John 3:36). When Andrew and his companion ask Jesus where he's staying, Jesus says, "Come and see" (John 3:39). A little later Andrew himself effectively says, "Come and see," when he fetches his brother Peter to meet Jesus – and Jesus' ministry takes off from there.

Andrew is associated with witness and outreach because he was the very first person to go out and tell someone else about Jesus. He's the pattern, the poster child if you like, for everyone from the early church right down to today who's gone out of their way to tell a family member, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger, about Jesus, because they wanted other people to have the joy and life they've come to know for themselves.

As to how Andrew came to be the patron saint of Scotland, there's no definitive answer, but many possible explanations. One is that the Celtic Church back in the seventh century felt that he was a higher profile choice than Columba, who had first brought Christianity to Scotland. Another is that a Pict king in the ninth century had a vision of the saltire, the X-shaped cross on which Saint Andrew is said to have been crucified, against the blue sky. After seeing this vision, the king led his army to a resounding victory against the Angles, forerunners of the English. That vision is also a possible explanation for the Scottish flag, a white diagonal cross on a blue background. Yet another suggestion for the choice of Andrew as patron saint is the legend that he may have travelled to Scotland, and that some of his relics are held there, possibly in the town of St. Andrews itself.

Scotland has a long and proud tradition, and that brings me to the Kirkin' o' the Tartans. But first, a brief history lesson.

After the first Queen Elizabeth died, she was succeeded by James Stuart, who was already king of Scotland, so England and Scotland now had a joint monarch. This continued until the time of his grandson James II, who was Catholic, pro-French and suspected of planning to go back to the style of absolute monarchy that had led to the Civil War a generation or so earlier. Those three strikes against him were enough to get him deposed. Scotland could accept this when each of James's daughters became queen in turn, but after that, the English throne passed to George I, of Hanover in Germany. This led to two rebellions by the Scots, and the second, in particular, the Forty-five, was a long and bitter struggle. After it was finally put down, the English government issued the Act of Proscription in 1746, which was a kind of Second Amendment in reverse, banning the carrying of weapons in Scotland. It also included the Dress Act, which made it illegal to wear the Highland Dress, including kilts or any tartan.

Legend has it that Scots defied the ban by smuggling scraps of tartan into church to be blessed at a certain point in the service. It seems more likely that the practice doesn't go back to the days of Bonnie Prince Charlie, but only to the 1940s in Washington DC, when a Scottish pastor serving there introduced it. Nevertheless, not only is

it a fine romantic legend, but it provides a great opportunity in this country for those with Scottish ancestry to wear their clan tartan with pride, and to combine that heritage with their Christian faith.

Coming back to the disciple Andrew, one of the things I like about him is that he kept it simple. He didn't have an agenda or a list of things that he expected a person to do or to be. All he did was invite them to meet Jesus, and let that person and Jesus take it from there. We can draw inspiration from Andrew when we think about what we might say to our friends, or family, or coworkers who haven't been to church in a while, or maybe never. We can invite them to "come and see" – the words Jesus used to Andrew and his friend – and if we need something more than a regular church service to get people interested, Christmas is just around the corner, with all its music and excitement and joy. There couldn't be a better time to follow Andrew's example!

As I said, Andrew kept it simple. It isn't that hard to do to invite someone to come to an event at church, or to a service, especially at Christmas. Paul makes the point in his letter to the Romans: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (Romans 10:8), echoing what Moses had said centuries before to the people of Israel: "This commandment ... is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven ... Neither is it beyond the sea... No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Paul has more to say about proclaiming the word in his letter. If we have family or friends who don't come to church, who don't currently have Jesus in their lives, and possibly never have, it may not happen unless someone makes the introduction! Yes, someone else might do it, but chances are, if it's *your* family member or friend, the person God has put there to speak to them is you.

Many of us here have some Scottish ancestry or connection. If we can't claim that, we may have visited Scotland, or at least dream of doing so one day. But all of us can be like Andrew: we can encourage others, in a friendly, non-pressurizing way, to "Come and see" – to join us here for a service or event, and see what Jesus has to offer. Don't be afraid – in the words of Brother Charles, be a risktaker: be an Andrew!