

Feast of St. Andrew (transferred)  
September 13, 2020

Deuteronomy 30:11-14  
Psalm 19:1-6  
Romans 10:8b-18  
Matthew 4:18-22

Even in this time,  
When all our patterns and routines are turned upside down,  
Something deep within us responds  
To the turning of the season,  
And so now,  
At the beginning of fall,  
We get in touch with these old familiar questions:  
Who are we?  
Where are we going?  
What do we hope to do with the time given to us?

Who are we, in this community of faith?  
We are a parish  
Under the patronage of Andrew,  
First-called among the disciples,  
Finder of the promised holy one.

In a world beset by every kind of terror and alarm  
What can patronage –  
such an old-fashioned notion –  
possibly offer us?

In some traditions,  
The faithful ask the saints to intercede for them,  
Bringing the concerns of the people before the throne of God.  
Certainly, if that were our custom,  
There would be plenty of concerns to bring,  
For ourselves, our neighbors, the planet –  
Your lists and my list go on and on.

Sometimes,  
Churches believe that their distinctive character,  
Those gifts and skills that make them unique,  
Come from the saint for whom they are named.  
Are we cast in the mold of that first disciple?  
Does our patron shape who we are?

We have tended to speak of patronage a little differently.

In this church,  
Most often patronage has meant this:  
We have wondered together how Andrew might inspire us.

How might he have been shaping our identity and mission  
Through all our years of growing together?

What can we learn from the stories of Andrew?  
What can we discern about his witness  
That might guide us  
As we set out –  
As all churches  
And all communities  
And all nations now set out –  
On uncharted seas?

It would seem at first  
That in today's gospel, such a spare story,  
There is almost nothing to guide or inspire us,  
Nothing from which to craft or discover a vision.

Or so it has often seemed to me.

In our wondering together over the years,  
over and over  
we have left this particular story behind,  
And turned instead  
To the beautiful, evocative stories from John's gospel,  
Where in just a few words,  
Andrew comes vividly before our eyes,  
The hints of a vibrant,  
Inquiring, resourceful friend and follower of Jesus.

Andrew, remember,  
Was a disciple of John the Baptist first –  
Until one day he saw Jesus passing by,  
Heard John proclaim him as the lamb of God,  
And followed.  
When Jesus turned and asked him,  
What are you looking for,  
He asked,  
Rabbi, where are you staying?  
When Jesus said,  
Come and see,  
Andrew followed,  
And remained with Jesus.

Then Andrew went and found his brother,  
And proclaimed,  
We have found the Christ.

When the crowds were pressing in on Jesus  
And had nothing to eat,  
It was Andrew who said,  
There is a boy here  
Who has five loaves and two fish,  
And so offered the material  
From which Jesus made a miracle.

With these stories,  
Over the years we have discovered and tended a vision.  
A vision of who we can be,  
And a vision of what we can do.  
Creativity. Resourcefulness.  
Invitation. Welcome. Sharing.  
The vision has called us forward.

But now, we find ourselves in new times.  
We, like every church,  
Seek ways to hold on to hope  
When despair seems a more reasonable choice,  
Ways to reach out in love  
When hostility and hatred are thriving,  
Ways to work for freedom and justice  
When the powerful promote gross injustice.

Hope, love, and freedom endure.  
They need new advocates in terrible times.  
New times call for new ways,  
New ways of proclaiming timeless truths.

And so, today, I wonder.  
What might we discover  
If we return to the oldest, simplest story  
Of what it means to follow Jesus?

Jesus sees Andrew and his brother  
Casting a net into the sea,  
For they are fishermen.  
He says, follow me.  
I will transform you into another kind of fisher –  
Fishers of people.

And they left their nets,  
And followed him.

A very simple story.  
Andrew is a fisherman,  
Until he sees something new.  
He sees Jesus,  
And he sees a new life.  
He leaves the old behind.

But he is still the same person.

What does it take,  
To be a fisherman?  
Different things,  
In different conditions:  
Mountain stream or stormy seas,  
Quiet pond,  
Mighty river.

A deft hand, subtlety,  
Patience.  
Courage, strength.  
Risk. Mending.  
And no matter what,  
Perseverance.

What skills did Andrew have,  
That Jesus discerned as he went walking by?  
What innate gifts lay hidden  
Until friendship and partnership with Jesus  
Called them forth?

What gifts might he inspire us to discover  
within ourselves?  
What gifts have served us in the past?  
What gifts are needed now?

Many of us, I suspect,  
Would like to be standing in a mountain stream,  
Looking across clear water  
To a field of alpine flowers,  
Blue sky overhead.  
A peaceful moment  
Calling for a deft hand, subtlety,  
Patience.

These are gifts that have served us in the past.

But we find ourselves now on stormy seas.  
Can we find the courage and strength  
To take risks,  
To mend what is torn,  
To try something new,  
Go somewhere we have never gone before?

Where is God calling us to act,  
In community and as individuals?  
What does God most want us to see?

No matter where we turn our attention and our energy,  
No matter where we test our courage  
And spend our strength,  
There will always be one, most important thing.  
And in this, above all else,  
Our patron can show us the way.

Like Andrew,  
Can we keep one thing always before our eyes?  
Can we see that Jesus is still coming close,  
Can we see that he is seeing us,  
Seeing our strengths as well as our flaws,  
And calling us to follow,  
To join him in his work,  
His mission of seeking and serving the lost,  
Welcoming the stranger,  
Sitting down with the outcast,  
Discovering abundance?

Today we celebrate our church,  
And the patronage of Andrew,  
Fisherman and friend.  
May he inspire and guide us  
As we set out into a future  
That cannot be seen –  
Except for one, most important thing.  
As long as we keep following the one who calls us,  
The future will always be a life where Jesus lights the way.