

Matthew 4:12-22 Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee & Jesus Calls the First Disciples - Sunday 28th November 2021
Rev. Susan Pickering

Gathering of the People of God

Organ Prelude

Welcome & Notices

Centring Prayer

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

Processional Hymn

Ch 339 Sing of Andrew, John's Disciple

Call to Worship

The Way of the Cross is a costly way,
This is the way that leads us to Jesus
Who always walks before us.

Jesus calls us to the way

We give thanks for the faithful,
Who have gone ahead,
Singing with the life of the Spirit.

Thanks be to God

We gather in this space as the people of God
To reflect upon the way to which we are called.
Come let us worship God It's time to offer our thanks and praise

Jesus calls us

Here we are the gathered people of God.

Let us worship God.

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that is in them.

This land is Holy Ground

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As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians, elders, past, present and emerging

We honour them for their custodianship of the land, on which we gather today.

Introit: People Look East Traditional Carol arr. Malcolm Archer

Lighting the Advent Candle - Eddie

A candle burns,
the sign of hope.
We gather together,
We listen together,
We wait for the still small voice that brings the message of hope.
Spirit of God open our hearts to the one who brings us hope.

Hymn “Light a Candle Bright and Tall”

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession

All praise be to you Holy One of Advent,
For you call each of us the road to discipleship,
we give thanks for your presence and steadfast love,
that feeds us for the journey.

We thank you for life in this place, in this community:
for the compassionate hand that reaches out,
for the kind words that are spoken,
for the words spoken by the discerning,
for the depth of silence,
for the light who is the Christ.

As the light shines in the darkness,
Shadows are cast upon the world,
And so we come before you with repentant hearts,
confessing to you our brokenness,
our guilt and our shame,
our failure to walk in the light,
The sea of the complex universe is so large,
navigating our way in your ways just seems so hard.

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We confess that often in our silence and inaction we are complicit, with and in, the sin of the structures and systems of the world.

We confess that in the excitement of the season we fall into patterns of consumerism and materialism and forget the cost to people and planet.

Let your Spirit flow through this place,
May she rest gently upon us,
Opening to us the vastness of your mercy,
that we may restore and rebuild
places and relationships,
that we may heal and be healed.
Give us the grace to forgive others,
as you forgive us,
In the name of the One whom which we wait.
Amen

Words of Assurance

God is light, Christ is light, the true light that cannot be overcome by darkness. As we repent, we turn back to God and so we hear Christ's words of grace to us, "our sins are forgiven." In that forgiveness we are set free.

All Glory and Honour and Thanks be to God.

Doxology

CH 809 Praise God

Tune TiS 768

Service of the Word

Readings

1st reading

Isaiah 9:1 - 4

**The Righteous Reign of the
Coming King**

2nd reading

Matthew 4:12-22

**Jesus Begins His Ministry in
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Disciples**

This is the Living Word

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Anthem

Advent Calendar by David Ogden

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Sermon

So today we're recognising/celebrating Saint Andrew's Day, and so I thought I would share some fun facts. St Andrew's name comes from the Greek, "ἀνδρεία" (Andreia,) meaning manhood, or valour.¹ As we all know, he was one of the 12 and was the brother of Peter.² Andrew was known as πρωτόκλητος (protokletos,) which means; "first called" in the early Byzantine tradition, this tradition informed by the Gospel of John, which provides us with the fullest account of the calling of the disciples.³ It's reported that Andrew was sentenced to death, by crucifixion in around 60-70 C.E., by the Romans in Greece.⁴ It's suggested that as he deemed himself unworthy to die on a cross the same shape that Jesus was crucified on, he requested his cross be Crux decussata (X-shaped cross),⁵ like that found on the flag of Scotland today.

It's recorded that Andrew's relics were taken, by the command of the Roman emperor Constantius II in 357, from Patras (modern day Pátrai) to Constantinople (modern day Istanbul).⁶ It's suggested that his body was taken to Amalfi, Italy in 1208, and then in the 15th century his head was taken to Rome.⁷ Pope Paul VI, pope between 1963-1978, is reported to have returned Andrew's head to Pátrai as a gesture of goodwill toward the separated Christians of Greece.⁸ St Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland, and Russia, but I also learned that he's the patron Saint of Italy's Amalfi, Barbados⁹ and Romania!¹⁰

Anyhoo, back to my Yorkshire accent and to our readings. Today's readings usually occur in year A during the season of Epiphany. The prophecy from Isaiah this morning is one that imagines a new king, one who would be light against the

¹ <https://www.saintsophiadc.org/tag/protokletos/>

² NRSV Matthew 4:18

³ <http://ww1.antiochian.org/st-andrew-first-called-apostle> NRSV John 1:35-42

⁴ <https://www.visitscotland.com/about/uniquely-scottish/st-andrews-the-saltire/>

⁵ https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saint_Andrew

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Andrew>

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Andrew>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Andrew>

⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/st-andrew-s-day-5-things-you-didn-t-know-about-st-andrew-a6753966.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.romaniajournal.ro>

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darkness of Assyrian oppression.¹¹ The Matthew reading is the beginning of Jesus' ministry and calling of the first disciples, the placement of this Matthew in the Epiphany season is really a reminder that the call to follow doesn't include bright stars of Christmas or apocalyptic earthquakes, but just a voice that calls.

The reading follows on from the wilderness account¹² and the scene is set. We are provided with a geographical journey which concludes with Jesus making his home in Capernaum and includes an abbreviated version of Isaiah's prophecy.¹³ Our account is the launch of Jesus' public ministry,¹⁴ and in short, points to Jesus' ministry being the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy which includes the expansion to include the Gentiles. Jesus began by issuing an imperative call to 'Repent,' as he declared 'the kingdom of heaven has come near.'¹⁵ As a side within the Gospel of Matthew the term Kingdom of God is replaced with Kingdom of Heaven, this change is suggested to be an attempt to show reverence and respect for the divine unspeakable name.¹⁶

To put some historical context around this we need to remember that the order of the day was of political domination at the hands of Rome, and economic oppression by the rich, it was an order that fuelled fear, and anxiety.¹⁷ Jesus grew up in the shadow of kingdom movements, people wanted freedom, because of what they believed about God, God had made promises to rescue the people and put things right. The people wanted a king who would bring justice and peace.

As Jesus begins his ministry his proclamation displaces the old order and inaugurates a new age, he's proclaiming that people are now under a new order, which is one of light, freedom, joy and justice.¹⁸ His call to repent is not a call to convert to a new religion, Jesus did not come to form a new religion, he came to establish a new way in the world, this call to repent is to alert people to the fact that

¹¹ Bruegermann in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

¹² NRSV Matthew 4:1-11

¹³ NRSV Isaiah 9:1-2

¹⁴ NRSV Matthew 4:12-17

¹⁵ NRSV Matthew 4:17b

¹⁶ Hare

¹⁷ Wallis in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

¹⁸ Bruegermann in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

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this new order, this new kingdom that's breaking in will require those wishing to participate to engage in a fundamental transformation.¹⁹

We move then to the calling of the first disciples, seeing Simon, called Peter and Andrew casting their nets, Jesus simply says; 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'²⁰ We're then told that they; 'Immediately left their nets and followed him.'²¹ Peter and Andrew's response is not a confession of faith but rather a radical portrayal of their obedience to the call. It's radical in that as far as we're told they seek no qualifications and ask no questions, they leave their profession and possessions with no information as to how they will be provided for, there's certainly no promise of a grand salary with health benefits and while it's not explicit in the text, they will also leave their families.²² The reading today is in preparation for the themes that will follow and are included in the Sermon on the Mount,²³ which is basically what the mission of Jesus and his disciples is about.

In the mention of darkness we need to acknowledge that there's something quite scary and ominous about darkness, particularly when the focus is on powers that we can't necessarily see, powers that haunt and threaten us, the gospel of Matthew looks to the darkness of oppression and abandonment.²⁴ So in this context, as we're celebrating Saint Andrew's Day today, our focus is drawn to his radical and seemingly fearless obedience and willingness to follow and to be transformed. For us it challenges us to reflect on our call to discipleship and what that means in our lives in a world that continues to fight darkness with darkness, violence with violence and hate with hate!

As we read the scriptures we see that Jesus doesn't call the powerful and the elite,²⁵ but fishermen, the only promise he makes them is that he'll make them fish for people.²⁶ The call to discipleship is unapologetic, but the demands are pretty clear. Discipleship is not about how to get into heaven or how to escape this world for another, it's about the rule of God and the values and economy of the kingdom

¹⁹ Wallis in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

²⁰ NRSV Matthew 4:18-19

²¹ NRSV Matthew 4:20

²² Miller in Feasting on the Word

²³ NRSV Matthew 5-7

²⁴ Bruegermann in Preaching the Word on sojo.net

²⁵ Hauerwas

²⁶ NRSV Matthew 4:19;

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on earth. When Andrew was called he didn't check on his bank balance, in fact he laid down his means of provision.

The call to discipleship is a call to surrender attachment to the values and economy of the world and commit to the exclusive attachment to the person of Jesus, to the kingdom, as the body of Christ. We are called to be the visible reality in our world, Bonhoeffer said 'the body of Christ takes up space on earth, this is a consequence of the incarnation' he went on to say; 'a truth, doctrine or religion need no space for themselves, they're disembodied entities, they're heard, learnt and apprehended.'²⁷

As the body of Christ we are to be the flickers of light that break through the darkness, the non-violence that confronts the violence and the love that disempowers hate, we are to speak truth to the powers that be and expose corruption, exploitation and injustice. It really is no easy task that we commit to, and the reality is that it isn't welcomed by all. We live in a world, particularly at this time, where there is a spirit of insecurity and fear, our world needs to see a fundamental transformation that provides a basis of hope and as the community of Christ in this place we are to participate in bringing about the transformation. Jesus says a number of times, do not be afraid and these are words that we need to constantly hear to enable us to break out of the fear and the silence. We need to be fearless and participate in the radical transformation that invites us into living an entirely different life in this world, in our community.

In his ministry Jesus spoke to the basic stuff of human existence, money, possessions, power, violence, anxiety, faith, law, security, true and false religion. He addressed the way we need to treat our neighbour, and even more radically the way we treat our enemies. The issues at stake here are not about doctrine, dogma and religion they're about life and very specifically life in community and how we respond to these issues will determine our allegiance to Jesus and the kingdom.

Saint Andrew, whose name this body bears, did not shy away from the reality of discipleship, indeed, he denied himself, he followed Jesus and literally took up his cross. While Andrew shows up only on occasions in the scriptures it's worth noting that when he did he was always leading others to Jesus²⁸ and it's safe for us to assume it wasn't only his words but the way in which he lived his life that attracted others, Saint Andrew was an example of discipleship and the reality is that it cost him his life.

²⁷ Bonhoeffer

²⁸ <http://ww1.antiochian.org/st-andrew-first-called-apostle>

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Prayer

Holy Word, you call your people to follow, not in shallow ways or by proclaiming lip service, but in ways that can transform lives and set people free. Send your Spirit upon us and may she reveal to us the true depth of the call about what it mean to be the community of Christ in this place and this city. In the name of the one who calls "follow me" Amen

Hymn TiS 473 Community of Christ

Church Councillors Commissioning

Prayers for the People & Lord's Prayer

And as a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the prayer;

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Peace

Sending Forth the People of God

Hymn Sing Hey for the Carpenter

Words of Mission & Blessing

Let us go out into the world,
As the community of Christ,
Fully aware of the call on our lives,
Let us not be afraid but fearless
Let us not be silenced but speak out words of truth and love
Let us be the presence of hope and transformation

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May the blessing of God be the passionate presence in our lives,
May the blessing of Jesus be our source of strength,
and may the blessing of the Holy Spirit be our partner in speaking truth, hope and love to the world.

Amen

TiS 778 Shalom to You

Postlude

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