

St Andrew the Connector

Cathedral Solemn Eucharist for St Andrew

This time last week the town was draped in the flag of St George – with St Edmund’s crown at the centre. Edmund for England? The jury is out. But there’s no disputing the identity of Scotland’s patron saint. Andrew the Apostle and Evangelist has held that role for 1200 years. As far as we know, he had no living connections with his adopted country. So what’s the point of patron saints?

Think about names for a moment. Many of us are given family names. I’m named after my great uncle. Two of my grandsons are named after their great grandfathers. Why is someone called ‘Cooper’ or ‘Smith’ or ‘Farmer’? Naming is about belonging, a shared way of life, a family’s identity.

This time last year I celebrated St Andrew’s Day with a church named after him. What does it mean to be called after St Andrew? The gospel of John tells us most about him.

When we first hear about him he’s a disciple of John the Baptist. John points him to Jesus. Jesus invites Andrew to stay with him. Then Andrew finds his brother Simon, and tells him: “You’ll never guess what - we’ve found the Messiah”. Then he brings his brother Simon to Jesus, who gives him a new name: “Cephas – Peter”.

The next time we hear about Andrew is in the story of the feeding of the 5000. Andrew is the one who tells Jesus about the young lad with his five barley loaves and two fish. Meagre resources – but once they find their way into the hands of Jesus, the crowd’s hunger is satisfied.

Then Andrew turns up again later in the story, when some Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover tell another disciple, Philip: “we want to see Jesus”. What does Philip do? He finds Andrew. And then Andrew and Philip go together and tell Jesus about the Greeks.

What do these three stories involving Andrew have in common? The most important thing about him is that he is a connector, a link person.

He puts his brother Simon in touch with Jesus. He puts the boy with the loaves and fishes in touch with Jesus. He puts the Greek-speaking pilgrims in touch with Jesus.

Who does Andrew remind you of? He makes me think about people I know who are the communication hubs of their families, their communities, their workplaces. They always seem to know what's going on. They make it their business to keep everybody in touch with one another.

Andrew makes me think of mothers I know. My own mum lives 200 miles away. When I ring her a couple of times a week, she always tells me what's going on in the family. She makes it her business to keep us all in touch with each other.

As we celebrate St Andrew's festival today, it's worth asking ourselves: how can we share in his calling to be a link person, a connecting thread between Jesus and the people we know, the world we live in?

Andrew was an evangelist, but we don't all feel it's our gift to talk much about God. Yet we are all called to be connectors, living links between the life of Jesus and the people we know and the world we live in.

How do you think that happens? Worship and prayer are obvious ways. Worship helps us to keep our ears open to the call of God, and our eyes alert to the needs of the world we live in. Like Andrew did in the story of the hungry crowd.

A hungry world. People whose needs are far more than we can manage. Do we turn our backs? We needn't. We can act like Andrew did. We make sure that our worship and prayer help us to keep our ears and eyes open.

That means taking notice of even the most meagre resources. And we say to Jesus: “This is all I’ve got. This is all we can find. What can you do with so little? I’m sure you can do more than I can imagine”.

What’s the point of patron saints, then? Like our names, they remind us of the family that we belong to. They highlight the character of our calling. And in the case of St Andrew, that’s about connecting a gracious God and the Bread of Life with a hungry world. Even when what we have to give seems so meagre.

May God give us grace to follow St Andrew the Connector in the way of faith and hope and love.

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