



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“THE WIND BENEATH OUR WINGS”

Scripture Lesson: John 1:35-42

This sermon was preached at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, by Dr. Daniel W. Massie on Sunday, May 11 at the 11:15 a.m. service.

With the title of today’s sermon, “The Wind Beneath Our Wings,” and with the knowledge that the word for Spirit in the New Testament can also be rendered as wind or breath, and with the realization that today is Pentecost Sunday you may well be assuming that I will speaking the Holy Spirit today. That would, of course, be a fitting topic on this day of Pentecost but I really have another thought in mind with respect to “The Wind Beneath Our Wings”. I would speak today about a man and a mission, both of which relate to disciples of Jesus Christ during the season of Pentecost or in any season of life. I want us to consider together the wonderful example of a minor character and the absolute necessity of a continuing challenge.

The man is the disciple known as Andrew. You may well be wondering why I refer to him as a minor character. Well, despite the fact that Andrew has always been a popular disciple and the patron saint of such diverse nations as Scotland, Greece, Russia and Romania, there is actually little written about Andrew in the gospels. We know that he was first a disciple of John the Baptist before Jesus called him and one other (probably John) to come and follow him. We know that he was the brother of Simon Peter who was very much a major Biblical character. In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Andrew’s name only appears in connection with Peter. The message of course, is that everyone knew who Peter was and Andrew is important, if for no other reason, because he happens to be Peter’s brother. But there is another reason and it is in John’s gospel Andrew emerges somewhat from the shadows and finally we get a brief glimpse as to the kind of person he was and why, therefore, he provides such a wonderful example for those of us attempting to follow Jesus in our own time. Let us consider the three episodes from John’s gospel where we discover a wonderful trait within Andrew, a trait we would do well to emulate and nourish.

Our first encounter with Andrew is in John 1:35f as we heard a few moments ago in the calling of the first disciples. This account differs somewhat from what we find in the synoptics, but there is good reason for going with John’s account. Why? For one thing John is more than likely the other disciple who goes unnamed in his own gospel. The fact that he reported that the first two disciples spent the day with Jesus until about the 10th hour or four o’clock in the afternoon, is the kind of detail that only an eye witness would have recalled. What is more, neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke were actually present when the first disciples were called and their gospels can only report what they heard from others. But John is emphatic that Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the first disciples called.

Now please notice that the first thing Andrew does once he finds the Christ, is that he goes in search of his brother Simon that he too might come and meet the Lord. If Andrew is the minor character who provides us with such a wonderful example, then the continuing challenge alluded to earlier is the necessity of evangelism, of sharing the good news of Jesus with those about us. Surely evangelism begins in our own households and it is often there that the work is the most difficult. After all, our families know us so well and they know what we believe is not always matched by our

words and our actions. Sometimes the most difficult people to witness to are those closest to us. And yet, if we are unconcerned about our own family members embracing the faith how can we legitimately be concerned about others? Evangelism doesn't end in the home but surely it must begin there. Oh I know, it can be much easier to talk to complete strangers about things spiritual, but if our relationship to Christ is something that brings to our lives a measure of joy and peace and purpose, then we dare not withhold this discovery from those who are nearest and dearest to us. Like Andrew, we must feel both the responsibility and the privilege of introducing our brothers and sisters, our parents and children, our extended family to the one that we have found to be the Messiah and the answer to our deepest needs.

We are told that when the two disciples of John the Baptist, Andrew and the other disciple who goes unnamed, saw and followed Jesus whom John the Baptist had referred to as the "Lamb of God," Jesus turns and asked them: "What are you looking for?" In Jesus, the Messiah, these seekers found the answer to that question. No doubt Andrew, sensitive to the longings and the needs of his brother Simon, recognized that this same Jesus was the answer to what Simon was looking for in life as well.

I wonder how many of us are as sensitive to the needs and the desires of those about us daily -- in our homes, on our jobs, in our neighborhoods, in our social circles. People are frantically searching for so much in life --- a reason for being, a task worthy of their full devotion, a God to serve, a love that is unconditional, a joy that is not available through the things of this earth, a source of peace and courage. What they may not know and what you and I ought to know is that the end of all their searching will bring them in time to the feet of Jesus. They may think that what they need is a new drug, a new job, a new mate, a new home, a new set of friends, a new dress, or even a new church or religion --- but what each person fully and finally needs is a new relationship with a God who has created us and who has fashioned us to be restless until we find our rest in him. Andrew knew what his brother was looking for and so he brought him to the Christ.

What if Andrew had kept the Messiah to himself and had not shared his discovery with Simon, who first became Cephas, and in time became the leader of the Apostolic Church following the Lord's death and resurrection. Clearly, had there been no Andrew there may well have been no Simon Peter.

As I indicated earlier, almost always when Andrew's name is mentioned, it is qualified by adding that he was the brother of Simon Peter. I wonder what this might say about the quiet strength, the grace and humility of Andrew that he was content, not to be the recognized leader, but to be a quiet worker behind the scenes whose ministry enabled others to bask in the limelight and the glory. You will find nothing in the gospels to suggest that Andrew ever had a hint of resentment or jealousy because of his brother's accomplishments or because of the attention given to other disciples. For some reason I doubt that Andrew was apart of that conversation on the road as to who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. Here was one who did not need the acclaim of his peers or the applause of the crowds for Andrew was content in knowing Jesus and in making him known.

Andrew has many a kindred soul in the church today who are willing to work quietly behind the scenes while others draw the attention and the praise. Not all the heroes are the ones with the names we know and the faces we recognize.

The song that Bette Midler popularized, and provides our sermon title today "The Wind Beneath My Wings", could well have been sung by Peter to his brother Andrew:

"It must have been cold there in my shadow,
to never have sunlight on your face.

You've been content to let me shine,
you always walk a step behind.

I was the one with all the glory,
while you were the one with all the strength,

only a face without a name,
I never once heard you complain.

It might have appeared to go unnoticed,
but I've got it all here in my heart.

I want you to know I know the truth:
I would be nothing without you.

Did you ever know that you are my hero,
and everything I'd like to be?

I can fly higher than an eagle,
you are the wind beneath my wings."

The real evangelists, my friends, are the ones who like Andrew rejoice in seeing others discover and use their gifts and abilities in the service of the Master. If the church is to survive much less to thrive, then we certainly need more Andrews at work in the world. As the Spirit uses them to reach out to others they enable the church of Christ to soar and the gospel to penetrate the world.

Yet another example of this trait in Andrew's life is reported in the sixth chapter of John on the occasion of the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples, as you may recall, are completely baffled when Jesus suggests that they should feed the crowd of people who have followed them out into the countryside. Only John's account of this miracle relates that it is Andrew who sees a resource that the others may not have recognized. In chapter six we read: "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?'"

You see, an effective evangelist like Andrew, recognizes not only the need of people that can be answered by the Christ, but also recognizes the skills and resources that people possess that can potentially be used by the Christ. I am sure that you interact with people each and every day of your life who possess all manner of knowledge and skills, all kinds of strengths and talents, that could be employed by Christ in serving his church and his world. Have you ever dared to suggest to your unchurched friends that Christ needs them even as they need Christ, and that the Church needs them every bit as much as they need church?

Effective evangelists are always looking for unlocked potential and untapped resources both within and outside the church. So if you are one of those people who may have difficulty in suggesting to your friends and relatives that they need God, then you might try to suggest as a first approach that God needs them and that God has given them their blessings and their talents for a purpose beyond their own private gratification.

A third and final scene from Andrew's life is recorded in the twelfth chapter of John. There a group of Gentile foreigners from Greece are visiting in Jerusalem during the Passover festival and they express an interest in seeing this Jesus about whom they have heard. They approach Philip about this, maybe because with a Greek name he spoke Greek also. Philip knew that his fellow disciple

Andrew was just the person to make this introduction, so Philip along with Andrew bring these foreigners to the Lord.

So first Andrew brought his own brother to Jesus. Next he brought a young lad with meager resources. And finally Andrew brings a group of inquiring Greeks who spoke those words that are music to the ears of any evangelist: "Sir, we would see Jesus." Now keep in mind that this was long before the early church had ever decided to carry its mission beyond the confines of Judaism, or the borders of Israel. So not only was Andrew among the first disciples called. Not only was he the first evangelist who brought another to Jesus. He was also, along with Philip, the first apostle to bring non-Jews to Jesus, long before the apostle Paul, who is commonly regarded as the apostle to the Gentiles. Andrew at least must have been open to the possibility that there was no one in whom Jesus was not interested and that his Lord was never too busy to receive those who were seeking and inquiring after the truth.

What an inspiration Andrew is for those of us who would serve as evangelists, as bearers of good news in our own day. Would that we would have the courage and the desire to emulate him in our daily lives. If we did then, like Andrew, we would be sensitive to the deep need for God among our relatives, our friends, and our acquaintances as we would look for opportunities to acquaint them with Jesus and with his disciples. Like Andrew, we would also look for resources, skills, and talents that could be employed in Christ's service. And finally, like Andrew, we would be desirous of bringing to Christ not only those nearest and dearest to us but even those people who maybe strangely dissimilar.

Andrew! He may never have performed miracles, or preached stirring sermons as did some of the apostles, but he was always on the lookout for people who needed the Christ and who had resources they could contribute to the work of his kingdom. The skills of Andrew are no less needed in the church today. You can be an Andrew without any seminary training, with no advanced degree, with no financial clout, and with no ecclesiastical authorization. All that is required to be an Andrew is to have a passion for and a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and also a love for people in all walks of life, and a devotion to the church of Christ.

Will you consider being an Andrew too? If you doubt whether you are capable of talking to others about the gospel or about your own faith, then why don't you come with me beginning this week and let us attend together one of the Christian Life and Witness Courses that will be taught by members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in preparation for the upcoming Lowcountry Festival next fall. It will be a blessing to you and it will also help equip you to be a blessing to those people that God will place in your path. After all, all of us have been given the Great Commission to go and tell and to make disciples. This is not a command to the clergy but to all disciples. What is more, we have all been instructed by Peter (I Peter 3:15) "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

Not infrequently I hear people complain about the decline in church membership, about the shrinking numbers of Christians within our own nation and culture. I hear people bemoan the fact that Islam is growing faster than Christianity in so many places. And they are looking for people to blame for this demise. But the question is not what others are doing about the problem but rather what are we as individuals doing about it. If you want to be apart of the solution instead of being part of the problem then come with me and let's get better equipped to articulate the faith that is within us. A recent survey indicated that 68% of Christians said they would not know how to respond if someone asked them, "How can I become a Christian?" I wonder what the percentage would be if we surveyed

our church members? At any rate, I invite any who have the time and commitment to join me at these classes starting this week. Amen.