

“THE FIRST DISCIPLES - ANDREW”

John 1:35-42

It was a moment that would be for ever burned on his mind – a moment that shone in his memory brighter than the searing sun flashing up off the water of the lake. And he knew all about the sun shining off the lake, blinding him as he tried to haul in the nets when they’d stayed out that bit too long in the morning. Andrew had been fishing all his life. He, his father John and his brother Simon had worked the Lake of Galilee since Andrew had been old enough to stand upright in the wobbling boat they used out on the familiar waters. Together with old Zebedee and his two sons James and John, they had built up the most successful fishing business in Bethsaida. So successful that Simon had been able to get married and build his own house over in Capernaum.

The rhythm of the day was very familiar. Up before dawn to get out into the deeper waters before the fish could see you silhouetted against the sun. Hauling in the nets and making for the shore, the boat low in the water with the weight of them all – if you were lucky. Then sorting the fish and selling them beside the boats as the women of the villages came down to quarrel over the best ones, the birds wheeling and screeching overhead, waiting for a chance to dive on the rejects. The rest of the day spent on maintenance of nets and boats, errands to the tradesmen in the villages, talking with the other fishermen and passers-by, and finally a meal with the family back at home and reckoning up the day’s takings. Every day – well, every day except the Sabbath. Then the day was spent resting, talking, with the other men in the synagogue, listening to the reading of the Scriptures and trying to work to what it was all about.

That was what troubled Andrew quite a bit of the time. His brother Simon was an impetuous, up-and-at-‘em kind of bloke, always rushing around, always wanting to make his voice heard, often without any attempt to think through what he was going to say before he opened his big mouth. But Andrew was a bit of a thinker. He listened rather than spoke. He pondered rather than rushed into action. And in the synagogue he listened carefully to the regular readings from the prophets and from the law of Moses. He imagined himself into the old stories of David and Joseph and Nehemiah. While the others reeled off the Psalms in the usual flat monotone, he savoured the phrases, enjoyed the poetry and tried to make sense of all the God-talk. And it wasn’t easy – especially if you took it as seriously as Andrew clearly did.

By and large, though, life was sweet for Andrew. He had his share in the family business. He lacked for nothing. He still had his health and his strength, which he could see starting to ebb away from his father and Zebedee. The family was secure and everything was pretty hunky dory. And yet ... And yet, he felt there was something else, something very close at hand that he couldn’t quite tap into. It wasn’t that he was dissatisfied – how could he be? It was rather that, as he listened to the Scriptures each week, he sensed that there was more to life than he was experiencing. And he wanted more. He wanted to know deep within his own life that the God who had spoken through Elijah and Jeremiah and Samuel could somehow energise him too.

And then, one afternoon he had gone over the other side of the River Jordan, to Bethany, with Zebedee’s John to sort out something to do with the purchase of some canvas for a new sail. On the way back along the stony track that wound between the low hills, they saw silhouetted against the late afternoon sun a group of people obviously listening to someone. The figure who was speaking was standing up, so it wasn’t a rabbi (because they sat down to teach). They could make out a passionate and unkempt looking person, his arms waving energetically as he made his points loudly and in a manner that suggested he was not to be interrupted. Some of the little group were sniggering as the preacher pointed at a few well-dressed and clearly very embarrassed men, whom Andrew recognised as the movers and shakers from the synagogue. “You bunch of vipers!” he yelled. “You vile hypocrites! Do you have any idea at all what God is expecting of you? No, you don’t. You wretches! You rabbit on about the Scriptures, but you don’t really know what’s in them because you never really listen. And don’t tut at me like that – there’s someone on his way over here who is going to make what I say sound like sweetness and light. He’s the

Lamb of God, the one you'd be looking out for yourselves if only you took any notice of the stuff you spout at each other in the synagogue."

And as the others sniggered and whispered, the wild man turned to them as well and shouted, "And you'd better repent, too! Prepare to meet your God! Look, these people here have repented and they want to live more in tune with what God has spoken through his prophets." With that he led three people down into the stream and plunged them under the water. Andrew was spellbound. And when he turned to say something about it to John he noticed that he too was standing there slack-jawed in amazement, a look in his eyes that seemed to signify some kind of longing. The crowd broke up and wandered away, but John and Andrew hurried over to the bearded preacher in the camel hair jacket to find what it was all about. His name was John, he told them (another one), and he was on a mission from God to warn people that they needed to get a bit more serious about him. He was going to be in the area for a few days: they could come and join him for a bit if they wanted.

Andrew sensed that this might help him in his thinking about the Scriptures and what they really meant for him today. Here was someone who was advocating listening to God and doing what he said. And woven into it all was the announcement that the Messiah was soon to be made known: the one whom God had anointed, to whom the prophets had pointed, was on his way to set things to rights and offer a new way of living. All the way back to Bethsaida, John and Andrew spoke animatedly about the possibilities inherent in what this John – "the Baptist", as they referred to him – was preaching.

For the next few days, as soon as the work on the boats was over, the two fishermen hurried over to meet John and spent the afternoon with him, listening to him and discussing what it was all about. One afternoon, just as they were telling John that they thought he probably had some of the answers to their many questions, John suddenly looked up and shielded his eyes against the lowering sun. He pointed at a figure who was walking towards them. "There he is!" he shouted, with an urgency that made them jump to their feet. "There he is – the Lamb of God. He's the one I've been talking about. He's the one the prophets talked about. He's the one you really want to listen to. I saw with my own eyes the Spirit of God come and sit on him: like a dove it was. That, my friends, is the *Son* of God!" And as he said it, the man walked past them and on down the track towards the lakeside.

Andrew and John were so surprised at the Baptist's outburst that they didn't know what to do. For a while they just stared. But they had plenty to talk about as they made their way home that evening.

The very next day they rushed up to the meeting place with a growing sense of excitement. They really wanted to quiz the preacher man about what he'd said the day before. Hardly had Andrew begun to stutter out his questions than John stiffened up, stuck out his arm and pointed at the same man as yesterday, who was walking purposefully down the track towards them. "Look! Here he comes again – the Lamb of God!" The newly identified Lamb of God hurried past them as if they weren't there and strode off down towards the lake again. Andrew and John didn't wait to ask any more questions, but rushed off after him. As the track wound round the bend the man stopped and asked them (rather abruptly, Andrew felt on recollection), "What do you want?"

The two fishermen looked at each other, rather non-plussed. They couldn't really just come out with it: "Are you the Lamb of God?" It sounded a bit silly like that. It was a bit rude just to say, "Who are you, then?" John opened and closed his mouth like a fish in a net and, in the end, Andrew blurted out, "So, where do you live, then?" That was the moment that John would never forget. The sun shone on the man's face and lit it in an almost supernatural way. His eyes blazed with what Andrew could describe only as love. His features softened and he held out both hands to them. "Why don't you come along with me and find out?"

Andrew and John didn't even look back at the preacher man, but joined the stranger as he walked on down the stony path. Afterwards John worked out that, with the sun just touching the tops of the olive trees, it must have been about four o'clock when they met the stranger. They spent the rest of the day

with him, listening as he, too, told them of his mission, of his desire to start building the Kingdom of God that the prophets had talked about. He told them, in words that oozed love and sadness rather than judgement and pride, what he thought was wrong with the world and he set out what needed to be done to put it to rights. They talked together for hours and hours, Andrew and John riveted by the wisdom and gentleness of this man who called himself Yeshua, Jesus.

As the two fishermen walked back to their homes by the moonlit lake, Andrew began to put together in his own mind the words of John the preacher and baptiser, the words he had heard so often in the synagogue and the amazing claims that this Jesus had just been making. He couldn't really understand it all, but he knew deep within himself that this was something that he had to respond to. Suddenly it dawned on him. This was the God of whom he had heard each Sabbath, but now God had a face – Jesus' face. God could be known in this man. And somehow that thought was transforming him from within. He fell asleep with the greatest sense of peace he had ever known.

The next morning Andrew was up as early as he could be. He was the first one down at the boats, but John was there not long afterwards. They talked animatedly about the night before and John, too, said that he felt he was somehow changed, that Jesus had had a powerful effect on him. Then they heard the shingle rattling as another person walked down the beach towards the boats. It was Simon. Andrew rushed to meet him, unable to keep quiet, gabbling away about this Jesus and the change he had already made to his way of thinking and to his gut feelings. "You've got to meet him," he said. "It will change your life!" For once, Simon was hesitant, but Andrew kept on at him and called John over to confirm what he was saying. The enthusiasm of the two men persuaded Simon. "OK," he said.

"Come on, then," said Andrew. "Let's go and find him now."

They almost ran up the beach, Andrew tugging at his brother's sleeve. He chattered incessantly about the ways in which the words they heard in the synagogue each week and the preaching of the baptiser-preacher and the things Jesus had said to them last night all seemed to lead to the same conclusion – this man was the Messiah, the one they were all waiting for, but had almost given up hope on. He talked about the ways in which Jesus' words had calmed his anxieties and given him a sense of peace and joy that he had never ever felt before.

They hurried between the little houses, which were starting to glow pink in the light of the rising sun, and as they rounded a corner at the edge of the village Andrew literally bumped into Jesus as he walked down the path. "Jesus! Jesus!" he said. "This is my brother I've told him all about you. I was so excited by what we spoke of last night that I wanted him to meet you."

Jesus stared into the soul of the big, panting fisherman. "You must be Simon," said Jesus. ("Strange," thought Andrew. "I don't remember telling Jesus his name.") "You're John's son."

"That's right," said Simon.

"I'm going to call you Rocky," said Jesus. "Peter, if you prefer it in Greek."

Simon looked at his beaming brother. "I reckon you're right," he said. "He's the man!"

Now, I'm not going to pick all over that again and give you three points this morning. I just want to put two questions to you. Are you like Andrew before he met Jesus? Wondering how it all adds up? What the point of it all is? Whether there's a bit more to life than you're experiencing at the moment? Jesus came to offer everyone all that life could possibly be. I urge you, like Andrew, to think carefully about it and to seek out Jesus – through the pages of the gospels, in the life of your friends, in the awkwardness of your stuttering prayers. Jesus still changes lives, just as he did two thousand years ago for the likes of Andrew, John and Simon. If you want to find out a bit more, have a word with me after the service.

Or are you like Andrew after he met Jesus? Enthusiastic about the transformation Jesus has made in your life? Eager to talk about it to anyone who will listen? Ready to bring other people to Jesus by the way in which you live your own life for him? It's not really evangelism or mission or any other of those scary words and concepts that we so often load ourselves down with guilt about. It's just about living out the things that Jesus has done in your life, showing by the way you do things that Jesus is a reality for you, drawing people closer to him through your own enthusiasm for him. Ask God to fill you up with the Holy Spirit, so that it bubbles over and touches the lives of others. Andrew's hardly ever mentioned again in the New Testament, but without his enthusiasm for Jesus we'd never have heard of Simon Peter. Who knows whose life your enthusiasm for Jesus might transform?

Questions for discussion

1. What first attracted you to Jesus?
2. If Jesus asked you "What do you want?", how would you reply?
3. Andrew first of all told his brother about Jesus. Often we find it difficult to witness to our close friends and relatives. Why do you think that is? How can we overcome that?
4. New converts are usually very enthusiastic, but it seems to wear off after a while. Why do you think that is? How can we keep up our enthusiasm for Jesus?
5. "Evangelism" is a scary word for many Christians. Why should that be? How can we encourage one another in evangelism? Shouldn't we just leave it to the "experts", the gifted evangelists? Why/why not?