

SAE THE LORD BE THANKIT!
Sermon, April 7, 2019, 10:30 a.m.
Kirking of the Tartans Sunday
Text: John 6:1-14

According to John's gospel, Andrew was the first disciple to be called by Jesus; for that he has the title in the Greek Orthodox church as the "Protokletos", or "First Called." The first thing this first apostle did was to go tell his brother Simon (who later was named Peter), *"We have found the Messiah!"* And Andrew brought his brother to Jesus. Andrew and Simon Peter were in the fishing business together; we know from Luke 5 that they had a fishing partnership with two other brothers, the Zebedee boys James and John; all four left their nets when called by Jesus to become **fishers of men** as Jesus' first disciples. In our Gospel reading this morning, it was Andrew who brought the boy with his meager offering to Jesus (*Andrew was always bringing people to Jesus!*), and by bringing him, he made the miracle possible.

The apostle Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland. In his lifetime, Andrew never actually traveled to Scotland; however, his **bones** did. As best as can be determined, Andrew traveled in his lifetime throughout Asia Minor and Greece. Tradition tells us Andrew was put to death, martyred, by the Romans in Southern Greece; he was crucified on a diagonally-shaped ("X"-shaped) cross, a saltire (*which is the image on the flag of Scotland, a white saltire on a blue background*). He is said to have preached two days from this cross, doing what he did throughout his lifetime ... bringing people to Jesus... until his dying breath. Andrew was buried in Greece; three centuries later the emperor Constantine had Andrew's remains exhumed and carried off to Constantinople. A monk by the name of Regulus had a dream in which he was directed by an angel to take St. Andrew's remains to the "ends of the earth" for safekeeping. Regulus managed to "raid" the tomb to remove St. Andrew's remains, and then he made off for the "ends of the earth" ... better known in that day as Scotland. Regulus shipwrecked off the eastern shore of Scotland, and came ashore at a Pictish settlement there; this settlement later became known as the port city of St. Andrews, Scotland.

The Feast Day for St. Andrew is November 30, and some peculiar superstitions have attached themselves to that day. An old German tradition says that single women who wish to marry should ask for Saint Andrew's help on the Eve of his feast, sleep in their "birthday suits" that night; they will then see their future husbands in their dreams. That gives whole new meaning to Andrew being a "fisher of men," doesn't it? Another tradition says that young women should note the location of barking dogs on St. Andrew's Eve, for their future husbands will come from that direction.

My favorite biblical account of Andrew is found in John 6, our Gospel text this morning. As many of you know, only two miracles of Jesus are recorded by all four Gospel writers. The first is what we will be celebrating in two weeks ... the miracle of the Resurrection. All four Gospels contain an account of the Resurrection. The **only** other miracle of Jesus to be recorded by all four Gospel writers is the miraculous feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish; we find it in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6. Of all the many miracles performed by our Lord, this is the only one other than the Resurrection itself to be recorded by all four Gospel writers, by inference giving this miracle almost as much importance as the Resurrection itself! There is so much to be said about this miraculous account, but in the time we have this morning I will focus on just one aspect of it. But make no mistake about it; the Gospel writers believed it was a truly miraculous event. And, as John records, Andrew played a prominent role.

How large was the crowd? We know it was at least five thousand strong ... but Matthew's account infers the women and children weren't counted among that number. There may have been as many as **ten** thousand or more in that needy, hungry crowd! We are told when Jesus looked up and saw this great crowd coming toward Him, He turned to His disciple Philip and, perhaps with a bit of a twinkle in his eye, said, *"So, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"* (*"How do we give them their fill, Phil?"*) As the text tells us, He asked this only to test Philip, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip's response was to say, in so many words, *"What do you mean, we? Where shall WE buy bread? There's just too much need for us to meet! Eight month's wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite."*

Phillip's response was to produce statistics to show what could not be done. Overwhelmed by the size of the need, his response was to focus on what they did not have, to moan about what they lacked. We all know

people like that, don't we? None of us here do that, of course, but we know people who do ... people whose usual response to difficulty and challenge is to call attention to what they don't have, to focus more on what's wrong than on what's right, to go on and on about whatever life has not given us to meet the crowd of demands in our lives.

Not the patron saint of Scotland! Andrew pipes up: *"Well, wait a minute. Here's a wee lad with something in his hand. What do you have on hand, son? Why, this bonnie boy has five loaves and two fish."* If Philip's response was to focus on what they didn't have, then Andrew's response was to at least count what they *did* have. He called attention to what they did have; he assessed their assets, meager as they were, and offers them in faith to Jesus. Andrew says, in so many words, *"Let's at least see what we do have, what do we have on hand, and let's bring it to Jesus, and see what He can do! Let's trust Him for a miracle!"* Sure, we may be sorry that we don't have more to bring, but that is no reason for failing to bring to Jesus what we *do* have in the first place! So Andrew brings the boy with his meager offering to Jesus, then asks ... and I believe somewhat expectantly ... *"But how far will this go among so many?" "What can Jesus do with this?"*

Jesus reply to Andrew's question? *"Have the people sit down."* And the disciples do so! Mark and Luke record for us that the disciples seat the people in groups of fifty. *"Let's do this decently and in order. Get the people organized, have them sit in groups of fifty, and tell them to get ready to receive a meal."* Perhaps they are thinking to themselves, *"We don't know **how** Jesus is going to do this, it just doesn't make sense, it's not ... reasonable. But, Jesus says have the people get ready to eat, so ... let's get them ready to eat!"*

John 6:11: *"Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted; He did the same with the fish."* Note: Jesus took their limited resources, He takes the five loaves and two fish in His hands, and He gives thanks to God for these provisions. He's holding such meager resources in front of this multitude of need and yet gives thanks to God for what He has been given. Note that He doesn't create food out of thin air to feed the hungry, nor did He turn rocks into bread as He was tempted to do by the devil in the wilderness. No, He takes the very real food that is offered by His followers, giving thanks to God for the resources they have given him, and those resources are in turn multiplied by God ... *because they are freely offered with gratitude through Jesus Christ.*

The other three Gospels make clear that it was in the hands of the disciples that the miracle took place; the loaves and fish multiply in their hands as they distribute the ever-increasing supply of food. Again, Jesus takes the offered food, gives thanks, breaks the loaves, and then gives the food to the disciples to distribute. And it appears that it was in the hands of the disciples the miracle took place; the loaves and fish multiply in their hands as they distribute the ever-increasing supply. They give what they have, Jesus offers their offerings in gratitude, and their meager offerings are multiplied and become a source of blessing for many through their ministry of faithful service in obedience to Jesus Christ. And I believe that principle carries on to this day. God *still* chooses to deliver blessing beyond measure to a needy world through the faithful offerings of His grateful followers given to Him through Jesus Christ! We read that all five or ten or fifteen thousand eat their fill, with twelve baskets full of bread and fish left over.

God can bless and multiply even the most meager offering given in gratitude. We all have limitations, just like all of Jesus' disciples. And at some time or another, in some form or another, each one of us will face a needy crowd, figuratively or literally, and that crowd may threaten to overwhelm us ... it may be a crowd of needy kids at home (*it may be one needy child who just seems like a crowd*), it may be a crowd of impossible demands at the workplace, it may be a crowd of expectations from so many people who want something from you, it may be a crowd of obligations overwhelming your resources and time ... and you just don't believe you have the resources to take care of that crowd.

When such a crowd threatens to overwhelm us, there are basically two options. Like Phillip, we can whine about our limitations. We can focus on what we don't have, we can carry on about whatever life has not given us, as we throw up our hands in despair and try to make the crowd go away. But the grim reality is that the crowd, whatever it is, will not go away. Or, like Andrew, we can spend time counting our limitations, taking inventory of what we do have in our hands, and with gratitude and faith that you do have SOMETHING to give, and just lay it all out before Jesus ... as the Scots' Selkik prayer puts it, *"And sae the Lord be thankit!"* Put what you have in the hands of Jesus Christ, and do so with gratitude that you have at least something to give ... and trust Him for the miraculous.