

SERMON NOTES FOR 11.17.19 St. Andrew's Encinitas
The Rt. Rev. Susan Brown Snook

Happy Feast of St. Andrew! It is a pleasure to be here with you on the feast day of your church, to hear bagpipes, do confirmations and receptions, and get to know this wonderful church on my first visitation here. I'm a great admirer of your rector, Mother Brenda, who served on the bishop nominating committee and was one of the truly welcoming presences on that committee that convinced me that this diocese would be a wonderful place to serve. I'm also deeply appreciative of the ministry of your associate rector, Rev. Richard, whose work on our Commission on Ministry is helpful and insightful. In case you weren't aware, I awarded the Bishop's Cross to two people at last weekend's convention who have given extraordinary service to our diocese; one of them was your own Jim Stiven, whose sacrificial work on behalf of our diocese during the bishop transition can't be overstated – thank you, Jim. And I'm glad to get to know you, the people of St. Andrew's, in this vibrant, exciting, mission-oriented church. I so appreciate your ministries here.

I'm not the only one: you are known in your community. Mother Brenda told me a story: her friend from Rotary Club was out walking, someone came along walking the other direction, and said, "Do you know where St. Andrew's is? I need to get something to eat." Yes, she knew where St. Andrew's was. You are a church that is known in your community for helping those in need.

In fact, the kind of ministries this church engages in are very appropriate, considering the saint you are named after. We don't read a lot about St. Andrew in the Bible, but what we do find indicates that Andrew was a true servant and disciple of Jesus. Andrew is considered the first disciple of Jesus, because in the gospel of John we learn that he was a follower of John the Baptist, until John saw Jesus walking by one day and said to Andrew, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Andrew, at John's encouragement, turned and followed Jesus, until Jesus turned around and asked, "What are you looking for?" Andrew said, "Where are you staying?" Jesus replied, "Come and see." Andrew came and saw what Jesus was up to, and then went and got his brother, Simon Peter, and said, "We have found the Messiah." So Andrew was the first disciple and the first evangelist.

Later, Andrew and Peter must have gone home to Galilee and gone back to their regular profession, fishing, because we learn that Jesus comes walking along the seashore and says to the brothers, "Come and follow me, and I will make you fish for people." They drop everything and follow him. In following Jesus without question, they show that they are courageous risk-takers, who are willing to leave behind a good living to follow this Messiah with an uncertain future, going who knows where, to do who knows what – just knowing somewhere in their hearts that God is calling them to go. These first two disciples become the first to follow Jesus in what our diocese calls fearless love – or, perhaps they aren't fearless so much as they are courageous – they are willing to act in the face of fear, to do the thing God calls

them to do, even though they have no idea what it will cost them to do it, even though they may be afraid.

Later still, Andrew is present with all the other disciples as Jesus is teaching, and it becomes late, and the disciples grow worried that the people have nothing to eat. Jesus says, “You give them something to eat,” and Andrew is the one who finds a boy with five loaves and two fish, which Jesus transforms into enough food to feed thousands of people.

So we know that Andrew is a servant, a feeder of multitudes, a person concerned about the daily needs of others, and a person who makes connections between people. He connects the boy with Jesus so Jesus can work his most famous miracle. He connects his brother Peter with Jesus so Jesus can build his church on the rock that is Peter, the leader of the disciples. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Andrew will travel far, perhaps as far as southern Russia, bringing the good news of Jesus and connecting people with the hope of everlasting life in him. At the end of his life, Christian tradition says that Andrew, like many of the apostles, was martyred – crucified on an X-shaped cross because he said he wasn’t worthy to die on a regular cross like Jesus – giving himself for his faith to the very end, in probably not fearless love, but courageous love.

Andrew embodies every trait that a follower of Jesus should have: he is a true disciple, who sits at Jesus’ feet and learns from him; he is an evangelist, who helps others come to know Jesus and follow him too; he is a servant, who acts in love to meet the needs of the world; and he is a person who acts courageously to answer God’s call, even to giving his own life for his faith.

In fact, Andrew is the kind of person I believe God calls all of us to be. At our diocesan convention last weekend, I invited our diocese to live, not so much in fearless love, because human beings are fearful – we are sometimes afraid, and there’s no sense denying it. But in courageous love. Because heroes – heroes in our world, and heroes of our faith, are the people who can act with courage in the face of fear. Courage comes from your heart. Courage means you act without knowing the outcome. Courage means you do what you are called to do even though it may be costly. In the church, courage calls us to act with love – courageous love. That’s what I believe we’re called to do in our church – live with courageous love.

I also asked our diocese to spend the next three years focusing on exactly the same priorities Andrew embodied in his life: Discipleship, Evangelism, and Service. Let’s talk about what each of these things means in our 21st-century world.

Discipleship, for Andrew, meant leaving his fishing boat – his livelihood – behind, and following Jesus for three years, learning what Jesus was teaching about the kingdom of God, watching Jesus put that kingdom into action by healing people and forgiving people and transforming people’s lives. And it meant that when Jesus was no longer physically present, Andrew kept on learning, kept on watching God in

action, kept on devoting his life to the call Jesus had given him long ago when he invited him to leave boat behind. For Andrew, the words in our Old Testament lesson, quoted in our New Testament lesson, were very true: the word of God is not far away, up in heaven or beyond the sea. No, it is very near us, it is in our mouth and in our hearts.

For us, being a disciple usually doesn't require us to give our lives, go evangelizing to Russia, be crucified on an X-shaped cross. Most of us can keep on following Jesus right where we are. Discipleship for us means learning from Jesus and putting Jesus' commands into action in our lives. It means adopting a rule of life that includes daily prayer, which helps us to hear Jesus' voice; reading and studying the Bible, which helps us discover what God has been up to in this world for thousands of years, and what God might be up to now. Worshiping on a weekly basis, allowing Jesus to nourish us with his body and blood, to give us strength to live Monday-Saturday with courageous love. And asking how God might be calling us to ministry, calling us to use the gifts and talents God has given us in the service of God's kingdom. It means opening our minds to word of God that is in our mouth and on our hearts. Which is how we become disciples. We have to be disciples, followers of Jesus, learners from Jesus, before we can truly live as Christian people in this world. I encourage you to take advantage of the learning and discipleship opportunities this church offers, to help you grow as followers of Jesus.

Evangelism, the second priority, is a word that many Episcopalians dread, because we associate it with sweaty televangelists or people who knock on your door and insist that everything you believe is wrong, and you have to do it their way instead. That's not what evangelism is about. Evangelism simply means sharing the good news. You would share the good news if your favorite team won the World Series, if you went to a great movie, if you enjoyed a new restaurant. Why would the news of a savior who transforms our lives and promises eternal life not be good news worth sharing? It doesn't have to be fancy, full of theological language, holier-than-thou. Evangelism simply means saying, I've found something that's really important to me. Why don't you come and see? After all, that's all that Jesus said to Andrew in their first encounter – come and see. It's what Andrew said to Peter. If we've found something that makes a difference to us, that's something worth inviting other people to share, as Andrew spent his life doing.

The third priority, Service, means responding to the physical needs of the people around us in loving ways, as Andrew did when he found food for the crowds to eat. Here at St. Andrew's, you have a great ministry with Showers of Blessing, where you have discovered that there are people in your community who don't have the basic needs of life, no shelter, no way to wash. And you have brought people together to respond to that need. Not only providing showers, but feeding the hungry just as Andrew did. What a blessing this church is to the community around you. What a difference you are making in people's lives. Mother Brenda tells me that engaging in this Showers of Blessing ministry and expanding it to include a ministry every week, in partnership with other churches, has been a real act of faith, that every time you

chose to grow this ministry you haven't been sure where the people and resources are coming from – but every time, you have taken a step forward with courageous love.

That's amazing and inspiring, and I want to thank you. I want to thank you for being true servants of the gospel and your community. I want to thank you for being evangelists who have encouraged these folks today to take a step in faith, in confirmation, reception, reaffirmation. I want to thank you for building discipleship, for providing a place of worship and prayer and learning for all ages, so that people can sit at the feet of Jesus, take his words into their mouths and into their hearts, and learn how to put his kingdom into action in this community. I want to thank you for providing great leaders for this diocese and for this church. I want to thank you for your dedication that makes this a vibrant, thriving congregation, one of the most admired and respected ones in our diocese.

And most of all, I want to thank you, and encourage you, to continue to live and put your ministry into action with Courageous love. The love of Andrew. The love of Jesus. The love of every disciple here, who knows God's word in your mouth and on your heart, and when Jesus invites you to come and see, you respond to that call.