

St Andrew's Day 2024

Collect and Readings

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Epistle. Rom. 10. 9.

IF thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

The Gospel. St. Matth. 4. 18.

JESUS, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

First of all, thank you all for coming. This is a time of thanksgiving if not of celebration. I have had almost thirty eight wonderful years as Rector of Cuxton & Halling. I cannot think of anything else that I would rather have done with my life. We live in a beautiful part of the world. I like living in Cuxton Rectory. The garden is my pride and joy. Maybe these are selfish reasons for enjoying being your rector. Much more important than those things, however, are the people of this place. I have and have had so many great friendships here. I have benefitted so much from your support – your prayers, our fellowship one with another, the great things we have done together and the challenges we have faced together. I am not going to name names. There are so many, some here present with us today, some not able to be with us in the flesh, many who now worship on another shore, those whom we love, but see no longer. Some people have roles which are unavoidably performed in full view of the

public, others work quietly in the background, but we are all equally important; we all, all Christians, have our part to play, our vocation and ministry, as members of Christ's Church.

For me, above all, there has been the privilege of doing God's work in the particular vocation of an ordained minister, a clergyman, a pastor, a priest. To preside at Holy Communion (the service Jesus commanded us to perform in remembrance of Him), to lead other services, to preach the Gospel, to teach the faith, to be with people in their troubles and in their joy and to share with them in the most significant events in their lives, to play one individual's part in shaping these two communities so that they more nearly represent the values of the Kingdom of God, to share the Good News of Jesus with other people, what can I say?

Dignus non sum. I am not worthy. No human being could be worthy, other than Jesus Himself, but it is by His grace that we are what we are and that we achieve whatever it is that we succeed in. I'm well aware that I have many faults and many failings, but by God's grace I am what I am and you are what you are.

Thank you, Lord, for these thirty eight years and thank you all of God's people who have been my companions and sustained me on this journey.

I said it is a time of thanksgiving, though not of celebration. At least it's not a time of celebration for me. Of course I shall miss living in the Rectory with its expansive grounds. I shall not miss our local countryside, however, because I am only moving just down the road and I expect to be out in the woods with Tommy every day. I am looking forward to seeing my friends out and about around the two villages and maybe even in one another's homes. I shall, however, very much miss worshipping with you in St Michael's and St John's churches. And I shall very much miss leading worship and preaching the Gospel. The other things I might well continue – teaching, offering the hand of friendship, working for good within the community, sharing my faith with others. You don't need the bishop's licence to do those things. Indeed they could be said to be the vocation of all Christian people – sharing the Good News of Jesus, teaching the faith, caring for other people, serving as lights in the world, the salt of the earth and the leaven which leavens the lump.

I have made no secret of the fact that I believe that the bishop should have used his discretion in my favour and granted me a few more years (until I die or become too infirm to work) to continue in my present ministry. However, rightly or wrongly, it is the bishop who has the authority to make these decisions and therefore the responsibility for their consequences. What I do not want to do is in any way to hinder God's purposes for the Church in these two villages. What we must do is to pray for all those who have to take decisions regarding our future and also to support those who, like the churchwardens, will have extra responsibilities in this time of transition. Be prepared to challenge even powerful people if you believe them to be mistaken, but don't fall out with other Christians even if you disagree with them. *Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

What I hope for is that, under a new regime, the churches in this parish will grow both in stature and in number. I might be jealous if that is what happens after I'm gone, but I shall also be thankful and rejoice and I will celebrate the ministry of the new minister.

At first, it struck me as ironic that I have to give up preaching the Gospel and other aspects of the apostolic ministry on the very day on which we commemorate and celebrate our Lord's calling of Andrew and his brother Simon, and their partners James & John to become fishers of men. I wonder how Andrew would have felt if, when the four went to follow Him, Jesus had turned round and said to Andrew, "Not you, Andrew. Get back in the boat and carry on fishing"? I expect that Andrew would have felt humiliated, hurt and disappointed. But he ought not to have thought like this even if Jesus had chosen Simon and James and John but not him to be His apostles. Our lives can only be fulfilled, we can only be truly happy, if we do what Jesus wants us to do. It is He Who has called us. He has a plan for our lives. He gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit which enable us to fulfil our vocation. We shall never be content living our lives contrary to God's Will for us.

Being an apostle might be more glamorous than being a fisherman but both are necessary occupations within God's world. God loves apostles and fishermen equally and all people, whatever their vocation, are equally worthy of our respect.

As it happens, Andrew was indeed one of those first four to be called to be fishers of men, but actually he did have a slightly different calling from his brother Simon Peter and their friends James and John. Andrew missed out on some of the most significant events of our Lord's ministry. He was not present with the other three at the Transfiguration or at the raising of Jairus' daughter. It was Peter, James and John, but not Andrew, who were asked to be with Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified – and even they fell asleep.

On the other hand, it was Andrew who first introduced his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. It was Andrew who brought the boy with the five loaves and two fishes to Jesus, Who then used them in performing the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. It was to Andrew that Philip looked for guidance when some Greeks approached him asking, *We would see Jesus*.

Andrew was definitely one of the first four apostles, but his calling was slightly different from that of the other three.

When I was exploring the possibility of being ordained back in the mid 1970s, Philip Goodrich was Bishop of Tonbridge and Diocesan Director of Ordinands. He set me to write an essay on what I thought the Church is. I based my answer on the Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Book of Common Prayer Communion service. He must have been satisfied with my response. Otherwise I might not have been here, preaching this sermon today. I still believe what I believed then and it's what we all ought to believe because it is rooted in the Bible, the Word of God.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ;

I have said that it is a tremendous privilege to be a minister of religion. But that is just a small part of it. It is an infinitely great privilege to be a Christian, to be called by God, not because we deserve to be, but simply because God loves us, to be nourished by Jesus the Bread of Life.

and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us;

There is another Prayerbook prayer which I love very much, the General Thanksgiving. *We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.* We cannot be sufficiently thankful to God for all His good gifts to us – among them the means of grace, such as the Bible & Holy Communion, which we should never neglect. By means such as these, God assures us of his favour and goodness towards us. I hope that I have been faithful over the years in providing ample opportunities for the people of Cuxton and Halling to receive Christ in Word & Sacrament.

and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people;

This is what it is to be a Christian, to dwell in Christ and He in us. With all Christian people, on earth and in heaven, we are one with Christ, as Christ is one with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit. It follows that there ought to be nothing in our hearts which is incompatible with the love which God has for us. *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son.

God's grace assures us that we are on a journey. We travel in hope, the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. We pray *that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* We pray in faith. Because it all depends not on us but on God and God is faithful. I hope that, as your rector, I have been one of His instruments in supporting you through *the miseries of this sinful world* and bringing you home to your *perfect consummation and bliss.* We are called to support one another on life's journey until at last we shall see Him as He is and be made like Him to dwell eternally in a joy which is beyond our present comprehension.

And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in;

And so we come back to the issue of vocation. God has a purpose for all our lives. It may be something glamorous which involves wearing fine robes and having a special seat in church – though these privileges bring with them their own particular temptations. You might be called to perform some other task in the Church – like being a churchwarden or a musician or bell ringer or sweeping the floor or keeping the accounts or unblocking the drains. But

most Christian callings, most lay ministries are not actually performed in church buildings at all nor under the aegis of the institutional Church. All Christians are called to serve God whole-heartedly and unreservedly in their daily lives. For most that means things like being good parents or children, faithful friends or loving spouses, honest and industrious road-sweepers or tax collectors, students or nurses, whatever good works God has prepared for us to walk in. As the catechism puts it, *to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me*. One year, we were asked on the annual return, how many hours of Christian work the lay people in our congregation did each week. I took the number on our electoral roll, multiplied it by seven and by twenty four and came up with a number too big to fit in the box. As so often, statistics miss the point. It was Albert Einstein who said, *Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted*. Or as St Paul wrote, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*.

And so the prayer concludes: *through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen*. How else could we live? I'll use this prayer from the 1662 book at the appropriate point in today's service.