**John 1:35-42a December 4, 2019**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Advent is a time of preparation and study, where we look to the coming King. It is a time where the darkness is dispelled by the coming light of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world. Advent is also a time where we specifically look at the lives of individuals who contributed to the amazing story of the birth of Jesus Christ. We usually remember the main characters of the Christmas Story, Joseph and Mary, Herod and the Shepherds. Last year we even looked at the connections between the animals of the nativity, the cow, the donkey, the camel, and the sheep. You could even study King David during the season of Advent because of Jesus coming from his line. Which could lead us to looking at all of the genealogies of the covenant promise of a Savior and how that line was passed down. Specifically this year we will be looking at the Saints of Advent. Doubting St. Thomas, and even jolly old St. Nicholas who the world has adopted as Santa Claus. But we start at the beginning, at the most recent saint day in the church year which is on November 30th. If you open up your hymnals to the very front on Roman Numeral xi under the Church Year you will see the specific days that are special to the Church, you’ll see the different commemorations of the saint days and this one in particular is special because it is used to designate the first week of Advent for the Early Church. Tonight we look at our first Saint of Advent, Saint Andrew the apostle.

I don’t know about you, but like me some of you may have grown up in families where you were not the one who always got the attention. A brother or a sister did better than you at sports or in school or in music and got most of the recognition and the approval. I don’t think this is only true for being the youngest, and it’s actually rather ironic, but I was usually introduced in my life as the brother of my brother Andrew. My brother Andrew, otherwise known as Drew is without question the most quick witted and he has the most personality of all of us sherry boys. When I arrived in high school, over 4 years after my brother Drew had been there people still recognized the name Sherry and connected it to Drew, I must be Drew’s youngest brother, “Hey Jake, how is Drew doing?” Would be the question of the staff, the football coach, and even some teachers. Maybe that was true for you as well with a sibling or someone else famous from your family or community. Maybe you felt like your life was always lived in the background.

It must have been that way for Andrew, for he was the brother of Simon Peter. While there is a special and specific day for us in the church to commemorate or remember Andrew, he lived in his brother’s shadow. Out of the dozen or so times his name occurs in Scripture, only once does it appear without Peter’s name being mentioned too. In fact, Andrew is most often referred to as “Simon’s Peter’s brother,” as we saw John refer to him in our Gospel lesson tonight. Andrew was the first one to follow Jesus, but it was his brother who would become first among the apostles and be in Jesus’ inner circle,—Peter, James, and John. In fact, that name, *Peter* or *Cephas*, was a special name given by Jesus, meaning “a rock.” While Andrew first met Jesus, and brought his brother to Jesus, Peter got the name. Andrew would simply be one of the Twelve.

But that does not mean that we should feel bad for Andrew, as if he were being treated unfairly. For he had his own special, God-given place and role as an apostle. Not everyone is called to be the prominent one. And, in fact, it is a uniquely Christian virtue not to seek glory and honor and the first place, but to be humble and lowly, considering others better than yourself (Phil 2:3). Jesus himself would say, “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt 23:12).

This was the way of Andrew, even as it was the way of Andrew’s first teacher and rabbi, John the Baptist. John’s task was to prepare the way of the Lord, to point to Jesus and say, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). John’s purpose was not to gain permanent disciples for himself, but to lose his disciples to Jesus, to lead people to him who is the Christ. Later, John would say of Jesus, as we read in John chapter 3, “He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease” It was time for John to fade from the scene and for Jesus to become the focus, so that all may know that he is the One to follow, the fulfillment of prophecy, the promised Messiah.

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” That is true not only for John or Andrew but for all of us as well, especially during this penitential season of Advent. Advent is a time where we decrease the praise, we sing different kinds of hymns and even exclude the Gloria in Excelsis. You are to decrease, to die to yourself and your own desires, so that Jesus might come forth and be magnified in you with his abounding mercy and life. It is written in Galatians 2, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (v 20). Having been baptized into Jesus’ death, your old Adam is to fade from the scene and be drowned through repentance, so that the new man, Christ, may arise in you to live by faith toward the Father and by love toward your neighbor.

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” This saying showed itself in Andrew’s life in the way that he directed others not to himself, but to Christ. *He brought people to Jesus*. And I’m not saying that he only turned people toward believing in Jesus through preaching or his work in the Church after Jesus ascended. I mean he literally brought them into the presence of the very Son of God. For instance, in John 6, when the disciples were trying to figure out how to feed the five thousand who had gathered to see Jesus, Andrew brought a young boy to Jesus and said, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” (v 9). Andrew didn’t know if what he did would help, but he brought the boy and his food to Jesus anyway, so that the Lord might do his work. And indeed the Lord did miraculous things with that boy’s food. Also, in John 12 some Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Andrew, along with Philip, brought this request to Jesus, so that the Greeks might have an audience with him and hear his Word (vv 20–26). The fact that they were Greeks didn’t matter to Andrew. As Paul reminds us in our Epistle lesson. “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” (Romans 10:12) The most important person that Andrew brought to Jesus was his own brother Peter.Andrew was the first to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and that faith immediately led him to seek out his brother and tell him. It was the first thing that he did, the Gospel says. Andrew may not have been the most prominent of the apostles, but he was the one who saw to it that Peter came to know Jesus.

You also get to be like Andrew. You may not be the most prominent one in the congregation. But you can do things to help lead people to Jesus. When you see to it that a child is brought to church to be baptized, you are being like Andrew, for Jesus is present at the font to do his miraculous saving work for that little one. When you invite or give someone a ride to the Divine Service or a Bible study, you are being like Andrew. For Jesus is the Word made flesh; he is living and active in the proclamation of his Word to save those who hear and believe. Just as Andrew led Peter to the place where Jesus was staying, so also you get to welcome others to come and see where Jesus abides for us with his life-giving gifts. So also do you get to serve the Church and your community in many and various ways, not magnifying or increasing yourself, but ultimately to give glory to God through your actions. We decrease and Christ increases as we direct people away from ourselves to him, the only Savior.

Fittingly, Jesus became your Savior by taking the least and the lowest place for himself. We know that he decreased, as he came in humility, as he went through his steps of humiliation. He decreased to the point of death on a cross for you, so that you might increase with the riches of his forgiveness and grace. Jesus is truly the Lamb of God, whose shed blood causes death to pass over you. Mary had a little Lamb who makes your crimson sins as white as snow. You are covered with the white perfection of Jesus’ righteousness. He who was humbled is now risen and exalted to the highest place and given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

Andrew was called and sent to preach that name of Jesus, so that many more might confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Tradition has it that Andrew, a former fisherman, became a fisher of men in Greece. Even as he had previously told Jesus of the Greeks’ request to see him, so now he would preach the Gospel to the Greeks that they might truly see Jesus and be saved. This angered the pagans nearby. Andrew ended up in jail. Eventually, Andrew’s death was decreed. If you ever look at the symbols on the altar here at Trinity you will find a symbol for Andrew. Fittingly it’s right next to the one for Peter, and it’s of an X. Andrew was crucified on a cross in the shape of an X. It is said that Andrew greeted his cross bravely, knowing that heaven waited for him after his death. Andrew preached Christ for two days on that cross, continuing to point people to him, before his suffering finally ended and he died.

In this way, Andrew’s life as a disciple came full circle. For when Andrew first met Jesus, our Lord said to him, “Come and you will see [the place where I am staying]” (v 39). Now at the last, Andrew again went to where our Lord was. For Jesus said, “I am going . . . to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (Jn 14:2–3 NIV). Andrew is with Christ. We join together with Andrew, along with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, in lauding and magnifying the glorious name of our Redeemer. For we know and believe that Jesus will surely also come back for us who have been marked with the holy cross. He will take us to be with himself—in soul at our death and in body at the resurrection on the Last Day.

Since we have this certain hope in Christ, let us learn from the example of Andrew’s humility. Let us “humble [ourselves], therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift [us] up in due time” (1 Pet 5:6 NIV).

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.