

-Reflection for St Andrew's Day 2023 by David Kennedy

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. *John 12. 20-26*

This passage from St John chapter 12 is set in what we call Holy Week. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds have hailed him with hosannas. John tells us it was a *great crowd*. And Jesus' opponents from the Pharisees were exasperated – 'Look, the whole world has gone after him!' God used even Jesus' enemies to speak prophetic truth.

'The whole world has gone after him!' And so, we read of the Greeks. These people were not Jews, but Gentiles. But they were clearly were attracted to the God of Israel, and so they come to worship at the Passover in Jerusalem. Such people were known as God-fearers, Gentiles who worshipped the true God. But these Greeks had heard of Jesus. They wanted to meet with him; I sense they believed that this God of Israel was powerfully at work in Jesus. So, they come to Jesus' disciple Philip. Philip is perhaps unsure how to respond, so he asks Andrew, and with Andrew, there is no messing about – I can just imagine him saying – 'Right, Philip, let's take them to Jesus!'

We never find out what happened at that meeting. But it does seem to have had a profound affect on Jesus, as subsequently Jesus declares - 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. This is the confirmation, that Jesus' decisive hour was here; that the cross was his destiny. But more than this, it is the proof that the nations, represented by this group of Greeks, were coming to him in faith; that the nations were beginning to believe in him as Messiah, as Son of God.

And Jesus uses the agricultural illustration - 'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' In one sense, Israel was like the seed – a seed full of life-giving potential, but Israel's true vocation was to be a blessing to the whole world, not to be an end in itself. It had to die to self, like a seed planted in the ground to fulfil its true vocation. So, Jesus as the true Israelite, the faithful Israelite, the sinless One, had to die, and bear the cost of human rebellion and Israel's rebellion; to offer his obedience for our disobedience, his perfection for our imperfection, his sinlessness for our sinfulness, so that there could be a rich harvest. 'Look, the whole world has gone after him!'

And that is exactly what has happened. The community for which John wrote his Gospel was a community of Jews and Greeks (Gentiles), and the apostolic mission was to take the Gospel from Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth – eventually to Britain, to ancient Northumbria, to Corbridge. St Wilfrid, our founder, had a devotion to St Andrew – hence, both Hexham Abbey and this Church he dedicated to St Andrew. Wilfrid, inspired by Andrew, wished to bring our ancient people to Jesus. For it was Andrew who strengthened Philip’s arm and together, they brought the Greeks to Jesus, and Jesus embraced them even as he stretched out his arms on the hard wood of the cross. What a harvest!

But listen again to how this reading ends:

Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

Jesus uses strong language – ‘*hating* our life’ is a metaphor; only if the seed *dies* can there be a harvest. The call to be a disciple, as Andrew had to learn, means giving our *selves*, our souls and bodies, to God as a living sacrifice. It is the opposite of selfish, look-after-number-1 living. It means seeing the secret of life as service, as giving, as seeking to follow the Jesus way, of loving God with all our heart and mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. This is the fruit that we are called to bring forth.

On this St Andrew’s Day, may we be strengthened in our resolve to serve Christ, each other, and this community. And let do it gladly, enthusiastically, with no messing about. May Andrew and Wilfrid inspire us.