

22nd Jan 2023 (John 1:35-42) – Life Stories #3 Andrew’s Story: ‘He brought him to Jesus’

The year is 1934 – and in Charlotte, North Carolina, a travelling evangelist was holding a series of meetings. The atmosphere in the town was tense. The evangelist was known for his forceful rhetoric against all kinds of sin, and high-school students were consequently planning some kind of demonstration out at the makeshift tabernacle, where the preacher would be holding his meetings. The hullabaloo finally convinced one previously reluctant young man, who was born and raised on a dairy farm outside the town, to go to one of the revival meetings to check out things for himself.

The young man, then aged 16, listened to the preacher that first night. The preacher thundered against sins, and he couldn’t help but feel that he was the preacher’s target. He went back the next night—and the next. Eventually, he decided to avoid the evangelist’s penetrating stare by joining the choir, even though he couldn’t sing for toffee. However, even without seeing the preacher’s eyes, he heard that voice, as well as another voice—one stiller and smaller than that of the loud preacher. By the end of that week, he had committed his life to that still, small voice – to Christ.

The preacher that day was one Mordecai Ham – and if I was to ask you at this point how many of you have ever heard of Mordecai Ham, I expect the answer would be not many. He wasn’t an unknown figure, he had an evangelistic ministry lasting some 60 years – but today, very few would know the name.

The young man, however, was Billy Graham, who went on to become the planet’s most famous Christian in the second half of the 20th century, preaching around the world to no less than 250 million people. And it was Mordecai Ham who brought him to Jesus.

Today’s story in our ‘Life stories’ series is Andrew’s story. And the reason I wanted to focus on him is because, **in many ways, Andrew is one of the ‘forgotten’ disciples.** He may be the patron saint of Scotland, but in the gospels he gets very little airtime. From this point on in the gospels, he plays second fiddle to his brother Simon, who (as we learn in the passage, v42) is renamed Peter by Jesus, and becomes the leader of the disciples and the early church. Similarly, of the four fishermen called by Jesus at the lake (which must have been just after this meeting with Jesus here), the other three – Simon, James and John – become Jesus’ inner circle.

Other disciples too loom larger in our consciousness. We all know about Matthew – the tax collector turned gospel writer – Doubting Thomas and of course Judas Iscariot. Even later disciples like Jesus’ brother James and Philip have a bigger role in the Book of Acts and the leadership of the early church.

But Andrew does one earth-changing thing. One simple act that alters the course of history. And we find it here. He brought his brother Simon to Jesus (v42). If Billy Graham needed a Mordecai Ham, then Simon Peter needed his brother Andrew.

At this point it’s worth pausing to note that in this short passage we see another type of witness, perhaps the better known one in the history of mission: we see John the Baptist proclaiming the identity of Jesus to those gathered around him. And we need to remember how vital it is that God raises up those with the gift of public proclamation. People who can communicate to crowds, who can declare truth publicly and winsomely. God still calls people like that, and we must continue to pray that God raises up, nurtures and anoints such people for the task – and also protects them from themselves and others. We all know the damage it causes when high profile Christian leaders fall.

But alongside this very public, high profile work, **there is another kind of witness, which is informal and private – the kind carried out between friends or family members.** The kind of invitation that we can all make. When Andrew met Jesus he did one simple thing after it – he told his brother, and introduced him to the Messiah.

Andrew is someone we can all relate to: we may not have great gifts of oratory – Andrew, it appears, certainly didn't. Here in today's we have Andrew's one recorded piece of speech in the gospels, just five words in English – 'We have found the Messiah' (v41). That's it! His one contribution to Christian thought (though let's note that that this does, in fact, make him the first of the twelve disciples to understand who Jesus was, which is quite something, when you think about it.)

We may be quiet people, not particularly brave or keen to share the limelight. But **this** passage reminds the Andrews of this world – and that is probably most of us – that **everyone matters in the kingdom, everyone has a part to play. We can all do what Andrew did. We can point the people we love to Jesus.** Perhaps by a simple word, perhaps by a Christlike act, perhaps by a simple invitation, just like Andrew.

Those of us who have family and friends who don't believe know that what Andrew did is much harder than it looks. Often we hit an impasse and run out of words. We've rehearsed the same conversations so many times that we feel we can't say anything more. But let's be inspired by Andrew's example and seize faith to believe that no-one is beyond God's love; that opportunities to point people whom we love to Jesus will come round again; and that there is great power in continuing to make simple invitations – gently, lovingly, persistently.

As I close, **Jesus is also very much involved in this story – and it's worth noticing that he too calls, he too invites: his invitation is 'Come and see'.** It reminds us that we don't share our faith alone. It's not all about us: Jesus is drawing people towards him, even as we invite people to do the same.

Take a moment today to remember the people who helped you towards faith. Give thanks for them. Even if you can't recall a specific moment or person, that usually means that you had a Christian parent or parents, and who knows, someone praying faithfully for you – in other words, people who were significant in your coming to faith. And as we reflect on those significant people in our lives, let's pray for grace to keep being Andrews to the people around us. 'We have found the Messiah!' – may others find our wonderful Saviour too, through us. Amen.