

Andrew: Bringing Others to Jesus

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[0 : 00] So a man had just moved into an area because he didn't know he needed a haircut and he went into a barber shop that he didn't know.

! And he walked in it was a Saturday morning and the place was full he sat down to wait to have his haircut and it soon became very apparent that this wasn't just a barber shop it was a bit of an old boys club.

And it was really clear that everybody else in there had known each other for years and there was a lot of joking and chatting going on. But he waited and he waited and he waited and eventually this lad came in he was about nine years old and suddenly all went quiet as he was coming along the street past the window and the barber was there cutting their hair and he said oh he's on his way and we went hush.

Anyway the boy came into the shop and the barber said to him oh so hi son how are you doing today? He said I'm very well thank you. He said so reaching into his pocket he said so which are you going to take?

Would you like these two one pound coins or this one single five pound note? The boy looked at them too and everybody in the shop was watching what was going on.

[1 : 22] He said well I'd rather have the two one pound coins please. So the boy takes them runs off down the road door closes and everyone in there laughs and it's really clear that this is a standing joke and it's a wind up that happens every Saturday morning.

Well the newbie to the shop has his hair cut and he makes his way down the street about half an hour later and he sees this boy walking along and he's eating an ice cream.

And he feels really sorry for this lad being the butt of everyone's joke every weekend. So he says to him sorry I'm new around here but I just saw what happened to you in there.

He said how long has this been going on for? And the lad says well since I was about five. He says that's a really long time. He says I know licking his ice cream. He says you do know that they're all just having a laugh at your expense.

He says licking his ice cream. Yeah sure. He said well do you really understand what's going on? He said yeah. He said you're sure you understand. He offers you two one pound coins or one five pound note and you take the two pound coins each time.

[2 : 37] Do you understand what's going on there? He said of course I understand. He said so why do you keep coming back each week? Taking one lick of his ice cream. He says because the moment I take the fiver the game's over.

Who's controlling who? Who's driving him?

In the decisions that we make each and every day of our lives. The values that we carry around.

Who do we really succumb to? What's going on beneath the surface? Who are we really following?

Who are we really following? Quite rightly we live in a world that has become suspicious.

And there is such a thing as a very healthy sense of suspicion. When we're presented with anything that makes claims to truth or something that can offer something new or different into our lives.

[3 : 49] And as such we ought not be surprised if when it comes to the language of Christian faith and the claims around the difference that it can make to your life that people will be suspicious.

Because we have learnt to become suspicious. Because we have learnt to become suspicious to protect ourselves. And there's a sense in which that's a healthy thing to carry. But I want to suggest that maybe, maybe sometimes we can become so acutely aware of that culture of suspicion that it makes us, perhaps subconsciously, but makes us reluctant to share our Christian faith with others because of our perception that if we do so, it's just going to hit a wall of suspicion.

If that is how we feel sometimes, we need to be encouraged by a growing number of reports that have been coming to light over recent months.

And some of you will already be familiar with some of this. But there are a growing number of reports over the last six months or so, which are highlighting a turning of the tide within the UK in terms of attitudes towards the Christian faith.

And which more than suggests a renewed receptivity towards it. Indeed, we could even call it a hunger and a thirst for what the Christian faith has to offer.

[5 : 37] Firstly, SPCK reported that between 2019 and 2024, Bible sales in the UK are up by almost 87%.

The Bible app, known as the YouVersion, free download, many of you perhaps use it, but in January this year, on the 5th of January, they reported the record downloads that there were 798,000 downloads in one single day.

But the really big report, and if you haven't heard about this already, you're going to hear more and more about it, was the report commissioned by the Bible Society in conjunction with the research organisation YouGov, called The Quiet Revival.

And it was an online survey, and it dipped into a sample of the UK population in 2018, and then again in 2024.

And it indicated that contrary to what we might think, UK church attendance is actually on the way up, quite significantly.

[7 : 09] And this is not simply to do with comparing and contrasting figures now with the COVID lockdown years. It's not. This was contrasting with church attendance in the UK before COVID and lockdown came along.

And across those six years, between 2018 and 2024, UK church attendance is up by 56%. And the biggest growth area, and this is where we need to sit up and pay attention, the biggest growth area is young adults.

It would seem that young adults are more open to God than the older generations.

And when asked questions about God and atheism, it would seem that if you are in your 20s, you are far less likely now to become an atheist, or to be an atheist, than if you were significantly older. To quote from the report, it would seem that having a Christian faith is again becoming normalised, and is arguably even culturally attractive.

[8 : 27] Now, whatever we may make of that research and of the research methodologies implied, and you can read all this if you just go online, you can download the report for free.

It's on the Bible. You'll find it with the Bible Society set of resources. It's called The Quiet Revival. Whatever we make of those things, those figures, those research findings, from different sources looking at different things, are beginning to stack up.

Anecdotally, we find stories, I hear stories from church leaders all over the place of how they're finding a renewed interest in faith among younger adults, who are just turning up, not in response to any particular campaign or advertising, but are just turning up in churches and places of worship. So with that renewed sense of receptivity in mind, we need to ask ourselves as Christians, why are we so afraid to share our faith?

Now, I'll ask that question today because as we follow through this series and we look at the 12 disciples, I'm going to be asking the question each week, what can we learn from each of them?

[9 : 53] And today we're looking at Andrew and today I want to suggest that there is just one very, very simple thing that Andrew teaches us and it is this.

His very first response to Jesus is to go off, find his brother and bring him to Jesus.

It's the first thing he does. It's not like he becomes a Christian, he spends some time forming, working out that newfound faith and then he thinks a little bit about how he might apply that faith, but it's all wrapped up in the same response.

He follows Jesus, he's got to tell someone. And what I want to suggest is that this is something that we can profoundly overlook when it comes to our discipleship.

The basic thing is, it's not, I'm a Christian, therefore as part of my application of that Christian faith, I therefore need to do this. It's all part of the same thing.

[11 : 04] When we encounter the reality of Jesus in our lives, the responses tell others. It's all caught up as part of following him.

It's foundational in being a disciple. Now firstly, we could say, well there's a missionary imperative there. There's an urgency. If Jesus is the way to eternal life, then we have a responsibility to tell others.

In 1998, you may remember this story, it was a horrific story, about a 15-year-old boy in Chicago who was with his friends on the streets playing basketball.

There was some activity very nearby among rival gangs, and there was some crossfire in which this 15-year-old lad got caught, and he was shot.

It just happened that where he was shot was extremely close to a hospital. So his friends managed to kind of get him close to just outside the hospital, but they didn't want to move him beyond that because they were frightened that they were going to do the wrong thing.

[12:19] So they called the hospital, they ran into the hospital. The hospital said that it was not their policy to leave the building, and that their policy meant that they were prohibited from being able to administer medical help outside of their building.

The friends pleaded with them that they would do nothing. Eventually, the police came along, and it would seem even they were powerless to do anything about it.

Eventually, a police officer managed to get hold of a wheelchair and wheeled this boy into the hospital, but it was too late, and about an hour after he had been shot, this 15-year-old lad died.

Why? Because the people who had the resources to help him refused to leave the building. That story sent shockwaves around the world, and it indeed would continue to shock us when we hear it now.

And there's a sense when we think about the Christian message about the gospel imperative, it should shock us if we refuse, metaphorically speaking, to leave the building, and we can find that saving message of Jesus Christ to ourselves and the activities in which we share together as Christians.

[13:44] We have that charge, that missionary imperative, not to keep that to ourselves, to leave the building and to share it. But if we focus entirely on that, I think we missed the point.

Because if we're not careful, we can end up with this idea that sharing our faith with others through the things we do and the things that we say ought to be driven by, just by, a sense of urgency, and not long behind that comes the feeling of guilt.

And if that's the idea we have in our minds as to what Andrew teaches us, then we've missed the point. Yes, the urgency is there, but more fundamentally, it has to do with relationship.

You see, sharing the faith with others simply comes down to this reality that if you have experienced something that you know is good, that is real, you would naturally want to share that with those that you know and those that you love.

Why? Because you want them to have the same thing that you know is real and is good and is life transforming. Before Tamara and I came to Clevedon in 2007, we were eight years where I was a minister in Mid-Devon.

[15:21] We lived very close to Dartmoor, one of our favourite places, still is. And when we first arrived there, it was just ourselves and we often used to go out for walks on Dartmoor.

Then three children came along. And for several years when we had three children, there was one point when we had three all under the age of five. And actually, going for a decent walk was a bit of a challenge.

We might be able to sort of drive onto Dartmoor and get out of the car for a little bit, but we couldn't go very far. It was shortly before we left there and came here in 2007 that the children were just about getting old enough where we thought, you know, we can manage a decent walk or what we would regard as relatively a long walk for us then.

And we decided, I can't remember which tour it was now, but we realised that we could just about get all three children and ourselves up to the top of this tour and back. So off we went.

We did it, by the way, and we were really chuffed, but that's not the point of this story. As we were about 100, 200 metres from the top of this tour, we saw the figure of a man and he was doing this.

[16:41] He was on his own. But then we realised that he was actually running towards us and we were thinking, is there something the matter here? As he came up to us, it was clear that he was okay, but he just had something that he had to tell us.

He said, I've just been up to the top of that tour. He said, I used to climb mountains. I was almost professional. I used to go all over the world.

I used to scale great heights. And then several years ago, I had an accident. I fell. I was told at one point that I was lucky to have survived it. I was told I probably would never walk again.

And he said that as I went through a series of several surgeries and physio, gradually, gradually, gradually, long story, but I managed to be able to walk again.

And then they said, well, you'll never climb again. But I was determined that I was going to get out there in the open. And today I have. Because today's the first time I've managed to get up that tour and back on my own, unaided.

[17:53] And with tears in his eyes, he said, I'm sorry, you must think I'm absolutely mad. I'm just so excited. I have to tell someone and you're the first people I've found. And you've got good news to tell.

You've just got to tell it. Not because you've got to. Not because there's some compulsion about it. You just can't contain it.

You've got to tell someone. Emily will testify to that. Andrew goes straight to his brother.

Not because Jesus has said, you've got to go and tell someone. Not because he feels he ought to. Not because he's undertaken a course in theology and in mission studies and has worked out that there is a logical progression somewhere by way of sequence that actually you do this, you follow Jesus, you get to know Jesus and therefore you must go and tell others about it.

That's not how it happens. When you know him, you can't keep him to yourself. there's a story that Nicky Gumbel used to tell on the older stories of Alpha.

[19:19] I'm not sure it's included in the current version of the course but it's a story if you've done Alpha in the past you may well have come across this one before but it's a story about a young man who became a Christian and he was really caught up in the excitement of what he had discovered in following Jesus except that he had heard somewhere in all of the gospel being explained to him that will we tell others about Jesus?

It didn't really seem to occur to him that it was because others had actually told him that he actually discovered Christian faith for himself but he was just really really scared about actually passing it on to anybody else so he didn't but this bothered him because the more he read his Bible the more he the more he kind of read and found out about Christian faith he'd become a Christian but he just felt that he just couldn't tell anyone he didn't he didn't go to a church he didn't open up to anybody now there was one person that he knew who happened to be a Christian faith a much older Christian and so he went to him and told him that he'd recently become a Christian said that he knew that deep down inside that there was something about Christians should tell others about Jesus but he felt really nervous about that and he was afraid that people were going to think he was silly that he was going to reject him we'd want nothing more to do with him and this very wise friend of him said you know what

I sense that God's making an exception with you I said what do you mean he said well I haven't listened to you tell your story to me I sense that God might be saying you to do something don't worry about telling anybody about Jesus you don't have to do it just relax but I sense that God saying that I want you to do this one thing go home to go to your room when you can take some space when you're not going to be interrupted by anybody and just ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit what about telling other people don't worry about that forget it just go and do what I said this man was both relieved but also slightly puzzled by his friend's advice but he decided to do what he said because he respected him so he went home and in fact there were a few people at home including next door neighbours in the kitchen having a cup of tea having a chat but he decided just to tiptoe off to his room and closed the door quietly and decided to get on with praying and remembering what his friend had said pray

Lord please fill me with your Holy Spirit as he prayed that prayer he found himself getting down on his knees and his arms stretched out and over several minutes he felt the most extraordinary sense of peace and joy come upon him that he had never experienced even since becoming a Christian to the point that he began to well up it was the most awesome experience and the sense of the presence of God in the room was almost tangible after 20 minutes or so of praying he couldn't contain himself he got up he opened the door he ran down into the kitchen and said to his entire family and their next door neighbours who were having a cup of tea It's fantastic I've just become a Christian and I don't have we share

Jesus not because we must because it's the most natural thing in the world to share that which is good with those around us let's pray Lord thank you for this story of Andrew thank you for the way

in which he experienced you and just naturally went and told his brother Lord we thank you for the encouraging reports that we are hearing of what is being referred to as a quiet revival in our own country thank you for that it would seem renewed openness to you we pray that that would continue that it would grow that it would flourish and that we may each play a part in responding to that [24 : 36] Lord forgive us for those times when we allow our own fear perhaps fear of how we might be perceived to get in the way of sharing your truth with others Lord renew us like the man in that story in the power of your holy spirit rekindle in our hearts that sense of knowing your presence your joy and your peace that it may just naturally and spontaneously overflow through our lives through our actions and through our words in Jesus name Amen Amen