

St. Andrew Christians

John 1:29-42

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First
Presbyterian Church of Portland, Indiana on January 15, 2017]

I

I ran across a story about a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application form that asked,
"Are you a leader?"

Being both conscientious and honest, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst, that she would not be accepted.

To her surprise, she received this letter from the college:

"Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that we have at least one follower."

II

This morning's gospel lesson introduces us to a follower who becomes a leader by leading someone else to become a follower.

Our story begins by reintroducing us to John the Baptist and telling of the testimony of John, which pointed beyond himself to Jesus, the Messiah.

In the verses immediately prior to our lesson, the priests and Levites come from Jerusalem to ask John, "Are you the Messiah?"

He responds, saying,

*"No...I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"*

Then the Pharisees come and they also ask him...

"If you are not the Christ,
nor Elijah,

nor one of the prophets...
then why are you still baptizing people?"

John's response is to point to the greater One who is coming—

*"I baptize with water; among you stands one whom you do not know, the
thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."*

To the ears of most of us who live in North America,
John's refusal to claim his own status is almost laughable.

Hasn't he heard about the need for good self-esteem...
or the importance of tooting one's own horn?

But in the Fourth Gospel, "It's not about me" is John's response every time anyone asks him who he is.

John recognizes that Jesus is the long expected Messiah, the Anointed One.

John has spent his entire ministry urging his hearers to embrace "repentance,"
to make radical changes in their lives toward righteousness.

But when Jesus appears on the scene, John's message changes drastically.

His work—
baptizing with water for repentance—
is no longer the mission of his life.

Now the focus of John's message is on what his baptism was meant to reveal all
along —
the One who was to come,
the One who was God's Chosen One,
the One who would baptize not just with water,
but with the Spirit and with fire.

As is true today for pastors all over the world,
John baptizes with water,
and his work is not for its own sake,
but for the sake of the testimony about the light that comes into
the world in Jesus.

John was willing to point away from himself and towards Jesus.

Later in the gospel, when his own followers come to him, complaining that Jesus and his disciples are baptizing more people than he is (John 3:25ff; cf. 4:1-2), John continues to affirm the ministry of his supposed competitor.

John directs his followers to take the next step—
to go from John’s teachings of repentance and water baptism,
to follow Jesus, the “Lamb of God.”

If John the Baptist had a Facebook page, his profile picture would be of him standing and pointing away from himself, and every response to a comment from his FB friends would be something like, *“Go on over to the Lamb's page.”*

III

The next day, John sees Jesus coming toward him and declares,

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Two of John’s disciples immediately leave him and begin to follow Jesus.

Jesus notices them following him and turns to them and says,
“What are you looking for?”

They answer, “Teacher, where are you staying?”

Jesus says to them, “Come and see for yourselves.”

So they come with him and stay with him,
and then the gospel writer adds an interesting chronological detail:
“It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.”

I used to wonder why that detail is there, but then I read an online commentary that points out how, when it comes to John’s gospel, we have to think incarnationally—that is, the Word became flesh,
the divine entered into the human,
eternity invaded time,
and that means time matters and marking time matters.

Important events are marked by the exact moment they occur.

So, for example, my older daughter wasn't born sometime during the day on September 11, 1984; she was born at 4:58 pm.

That time is imprinted on my memory—I'll never forget it.

And my younger daughter was born at 2:35 am on July 21, 1989.

And Libby and I didn't get married sometime on the afternoon of July 10, 1982; we got married at 2:30 pm.

Birth...marriage...death—these are moments in time we just don't forget.

When did you first meet Jesus?

Well, it was about 4:00 in the afternoon.

Can you name the time when you first met Jesus?

Can you name the time you first realized that Jesus loves you?

Two followers of John have now met him,
and it didn't happen at 3 pm...
it didn't happen at 5 pm...
it happened at 4 pm in the afternoon.

IV

Then in verses 40-42 we read:

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John's witness and followed Jesus. The first thing he did after finding where Jesus lived was find his own brother, Simon, telling him, "We've found the Messiah" (that is, "Christ"). He immediately led him to Jesus.

Jesus' first two followers were Andrew and an un-named disciple (whom biblical tradition has held to be John, the beloved disciple).

Both of them trusted their former teacher enough to believe he knew what he was talking about.

Andrew was Jesus' first follower,
his first evangelist,
his first disciple to invite others to share in this profound
and life-changing discovery he had made.

Andrew's first act as a disciple is to go get his own brother and introduce
him to Jesus.

In John's gospel, the community of faith is not formed by Jesus calling to
fishermen to leave their nets and livelihood and follow him
(that will be in Matthew 4, next Sunday's gospel reading).

It is the gracious invitation of Andrew that gets the first "two or three" gathered
together.

Everyone knows that the best form of advertising ever invented,
and the one that is still most successful,
is word-of-mouth—
people telling other people.

There used to be an automobile named the Packard.

Maybe you once owned a Packard or knew someone who did.

In 1901 Packard introduced one of the most famous slogans in the history of
advertising: "Ask the man who owns one."

Packard was the last car manufacturer to get into advertising.

It didn't happen until old man Packard died, because whenever he was approached
to buy some advertising for his cars he always said,
"Don't need any; just ask the man who owns one."

After his death, "Ask the man who owns one" became the Packard slogan from
1901 until its demise in 1958.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is also known through word-of-mouth advertising.

That's how the word about him gets out.

Only the Shepherds at the first Christmas heard the good news from angels.

Only the Wise Men were led by a Star.

Just a comparative few were touched by miracles.

Almost everyone who has ever come to know Jesus Christ does so because of the gracious invitation of someone like Andrew.

This should not surprise us, for every time Andrew appears in the gospel of John he is bringing someone to Jesus.

In John 6, Andrew brings to Jesus the boy with the five loaves and two fish, and as a result Jesus is able to multiply the loaves and fish in order to feed 5000 people.

And in John 12, we find Andrew bringing to Jesus the enquiring Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus and visit with Him.

Andrew's greatest joy was sharing the good news of Christ and bringing others into the presence of Christ.

Andrew doesn't have a big name like Peter, James, John, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or Paul.

We don't know anything else about him except this one thing—
Over and over again he introduced people to Jesus.

He issued a summons everywhere he went to "Come and See."

Andrew introduced his brother Simon to Jesus.

And Jesus was so impressed with Andrew's invitation he gave Simon a new name:

"You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Andrew's contribution to the history of the church was not dramatic, or innovative, or inventive.

He simply nudged people to get acquainted with Jesus.

When this happened, God did some amazing things.

V

In 1963, church membership and attendance peaked in North America and has been declining ever since.

In recent years the decline has accelerated, as each year one percent fewer Americans claim a Christian affiliation.

There are many reasons for this decline—

Our culture has become both more affluent and more secular.

Sunday is no longer a day reserved just for church activities.

Parents have a harder time passing their faith to their children in a wired world in which parental influence is in decline.

A very big factor is that mainline Protestants stopped having as many babies as they did in the 1950s and 60s.

But one of the main reasons, according to Christian ethics professor David Gushee, is that evangelism is dead.

No one really knows how to share the Christian faith any more in a way that connects with people, and many Christians have stopped even trying.

Most of us are intimidated, if not frightened, by the word “evangelism.”

Or we have been on the receiving end of someone else’s intrusive and clumsy attempts at evangelism.

Whether asked by a domineering brother-in-law,

“Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior?”

or by a well-meaning but intense co-worker,

“Do you know where you are going when you die?”

too many people have experienced efforts at evangelism as coercive,

even threatening.

One of the committees of our church is the Mission and Evangelism Committee, and this committee does a pretty good of leading and coordinating our mission outreach.

But in the three years I've been with you, not once have we discussed how to help our congregation do evangelism,

how to equip our members to share the good news of their faith journey and how God has worked in their lives with their neighbors and friends.

This is partly my fault for not bringing it up.

But the truth is, I am just as uncomfortable as you with the idea of “evangelism,”

So notice what Andrew teaches us about evangelism in this story.

When Jesus notices Andrew and the other disciple following him, he asks them what they are looking for.

They, in turn, ask where he is staying.

He simply gives them an invitation:

“Come and see.”

And then Andrew goes to his brother Simon and invites him to come and meet Jesus.

Could it be that simple?

At its heart, evangelism is **noticing** what God is doing in our lives, **sharing** that with others, and **inviting** them to come and see for themselves.

Notice...share...invite.

These are the three elements of evangelism, sharing the good news of what God has done and is doing through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us and for all the world.

Andrew is our role model for how Christians can notice, share, and invite.

And if you think about it, we invite people to all kinds of things all the time.

We invite friends to join a book club or to play golf.

We invite friends to go shopping or to come over for dinner.

We invite friends to attend a sporting event or to join the Rotary club.

We are actually quite good at inviting folks to come to things that we enjoy—
just not to church!

And, of course, we invite people to things we really like,
things we enjoy and think others would also enjoy.

So we need to be asking ourselves—
what elements of our church life do we value the most?

That is, we're not just coming to church because we have to,
but because we enjoy it,
because we get something out of it.

If we can't identify anything we enjoy about it,
well, that's another problem altogether!

Our task is to ask, who do we know who might also enjoy...
this event,
 this activity,
 this program,
 this worship experience,
 this community of faith that we are part of?—
 and then simply invite them.

Now that doesn't sound so hard, does it?

VI

Andrew is our role model for how to issue a gracious invitation.

Perhaps we can even go so far as to say that Andrew should be the patron saint of all Christians and every church.

Every church named “St. Andrew” should glow with pride and never hide its light under a bushel.

We might even say that *Andrew* should be every Christian’s middle name.

Like Andrew, we should be so excited by our relationship with Jesus that we cannot wait to invite others to “come and see.”

With our words and with our witness we are to be “St. Andrew Christians.”

We should spend our lives inviting people to “come and see” who Jesus is and what he is doing in our lives by inviting them to come and be a part of this community of faith.

St. Andrew Christians don’t just offer to give up their seat on the bus
or their space in the parking lot
or move over to make room in the pew.

Christians don’t impose, but we do notice what God is doing in our lives and the lives of those around us,
we share that good news,
and we invite others to join the journey.

When is the last time you lived up to your middle name?

When is the last time you shared with someone what this church means to you—how being part of this community of faith has brought you closer to God?

When is the last time you, like Andrew, took some brother or sister by the hand and said, “Come and see”?

Come and see what God is doing at First Presbyterian Church of Portland.

Invite others to “come and see” for themselves how the power of Christ is at work in the fellowship of his followers.

VII

Today is Martin Luther King, Jr's 88th birthday, and since tomorrow our country honors his ministry and legacy with a national holiday, I thought I would conclude with a passage from one of his sermons.

These words of Dr. King are an expression of hope. They are also an encouragement to us to be St. Andrew Christians, who share the joy and excitement of our Christian faith with those around us.

Here is what Dr. King preached:

"Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; say that I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

"And that's all I want to say..."

*If I can help somebody as I pass along,
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,
If I can show somebody he's traveling wrong,
Then my living will not be in vain.*

*If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,
If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought,
If I can spread the message as the Master taught,
Then my living would not be in vain."*

Be a St. Andrew Christian and your living will not be in vain.

Amen.

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