

Wading River Congregational Church

SERMONS IN PRINT

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John 1:29-42

"First Choice"

We are starting today a series on people who met Jesus: asking what we can learn from their encounters with him, what they tell us about Jesus, about discipleship, and – by extension – what they might teach us about being disciples of Jesus in our place and time.

We begin with a man who was known in the early church by a significant title: *protokletos*, the “first called,” but someone we probably don’t think much about. His name was Andrew. To us he lives in the shadow of his younger but more famous brother, Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter. There are good reasons for that, of course: Peter figures much more prominently than Andrew in the Gospels and Acts. We will have more to say about Peter another day.

But there are also historical and political reasons for our thinking more about Peter than Andrew. In our version of history, Peter was the first bishop of the Christian church in Rome, and his successors, whom we have long called “popes”, see themselves in that light. But if we lived further east, we would see history differently. In 38AD, Andrew founded the church in a Black Sea city that came to be known as Byzantium; in the late 4th C. it was renamed Constantinople in honor of the first Christian emperor. Today

we call it Istanbul. Andrew preached throughout Turkey and up around the west and north of the Black Sea. He became, as you might guess, the “patron saint” of Russia and Romania. He died in Greece in 60AD, a martyr’s death on a diagonal cross. His remains were taken to Byzantium, but in the 7th C. a monk named Regulus brought some of them to Scotland, whence Andrew also became Scotland’s “patron saint”!

To taste even a little of what the name of Andrew means in the east, you should read accounts of the visit of Pope Benedict to Turkey last December. He met there with Patriarch Bartholomew, the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, who in a symbolic appearance welcomed him to “the home of Andrew, the elder brother of Peter” – a gentle reflection of his view of the Great Schism in the year 1054AD, when Western Catholicism separated from Eastern Orthodoxy. In short, if you were an Orthodox Christian, Andrew would mean more to you than Peter.

1) *Andrew The First-Called*

But what of the Biblical Andrew? What do we know about his calling as a disciple of Jesus? We learn first that he was a disciple of John the Baptist. That in itself marks him out

as a man seeking God, a man alert to the words of the first prophet in 400 years, a man anxious to learn what God was doing in Israel in his day. But one day he hears words from John that will change his life: "Look, the Lamb of God." John is pointing him to Jesus, and Andrew goes to investigate. What he understands by "the Lamb of God" we cannot know - certainly not what Christians would mean by it at the end of the 1st C. when *Revelation* spoke of "the Lamb that had been slain" receiving worship in heaven. Perhaps it meant the lamb that took the place of Isaac beneath Abraham's raised knife; perhaps the Passover lamb? We cannot be sure. But Andrew, whatever he thought, went to find out who Jesus was.

Jesus confronts him and his companion: "What do you want?" - always a profound question on Jesus' lips, never a sign that he doesn't know, but that those approaching him should think through what they want. The stammering reply "Rabbi, where are you living?" suggests they are at a loss for words. But Jesus, as always, meets them where they are and simply says "Come and see." So to their surprise, they find themselves in an extended meeting with Jesus, in which they no doubt learned more than they ever expected.

At this point, Andrew and his companion are said to be "following Jesus," but when we compare this event to the narratives of Matthew and Mark, we presume that this was only Andrew's first meeting with Jesus, and that when they had all returned to Galilee from the region beside Jordan where John had been baptizing, there was another decisive encounter on the shore of the lake, when Jesus called Andrew and Peter to leave their nets and to follow him completely. In the months afterwards, we learn that Jesus is often in the home of Andrew and Peter in Bethsaida, where the brothers live together

with Peter's wife and his mother-in-law in a typical extended family of the day.

How does Peter get into the story? In what has been called one of the most important moments in Christian history, Andrew goes straight from his long conversation with Jesus to fetch his younger brother and bring him to Jesus. "We have found the Messiah," he tells Simon. In this action, Andrew shows us a side of his character that will reappear every time Andrew is mentioned in the Gospels. Perhaps a year later, on a crowded hillside overlooking the lake, Andrew brings a young boy to Jesus and says "We have only 5 loaves and 2 small fish..." But that is enough for Jesus to meet the needs of thousands. Two years later, in Jesus' hectic last week in Jerusalem, surrounded by crowds every day as he teaches in the Temple courts, a group of Gentiles who have come up to the Passover feast want to meet Jesus. They ask Philip, presumably because he spoke Greek, but he is unsure what to do and asks Andrew - who of course brings the enquirers to Jesus!

Andrew was the first to be called, and he then spent his life bringing other people to Jesus. His legacy, apart from his place in the history of Orthodox Christianity, was to be the man who introduced Peter to Jesus. Little could Andrew have dreamed what he would set in motion by that action. Years later, after he had seen Peter confess Jesus as the Christ, seen him deny his master at his trial, seen him as the first man to arrive at the empty tomb, heard him preach about the crucified and risen Jesus to thousands of people on the day of Pentecost, heard him proclaim that the Gospel of Jesus was now being received also by Gentiles in Caesarea - Andrew must have marveled at what God had chosen to do through his little brother - and all because he had introduced him to Jesus!

2) *Bringing Others to Jesus*

What do we learn from Andrew? That if you begin with an honest desire to know God, the next step is to listen to what people tell you about Jesus. That you may then need to get on your own feet and encounter Jesus yourself. That you should sit with him and learn from him. That if you do, you can be convinced that he is indeed God's Messiah, the Savior of the world. That you may one day find yourself called to leave the securities of life to follow Jesus more completely. But above all, Andrew would teach us that there is nothing more important, after you have met Jesus, than to introduce other people to him.

How is that done? It can be very simple: saying, to someone you already know, words as simple as "come and see." That could be a person in your own family who has never met Jesus. You do not have to convince them ahead of time, you do not have to argue them into embracing Jesus as their Master and Lord, you have only to say in some simple way "Come and see what I have found. Come and meet someone I have met. I would like you to know Jesus." What they and Jesus will make of their meeting, you can safely leave to them. Your role, my role, the role of all Jesus' disciples, is to lead people we know to the place where they can meet Jesus.

We call it evangelism – the spreading of the good news of Jesus – and of course the idea of it scares many people to death! But evangelism is not a call to argument, or to confrontation; not a challenge, but an invitation. If you are happy with your church, and your experience here of Christian community and service and worship – and if you are not, I'm sure you would be glad to tell me why not! – then your invitation can be as simple as "Come to church with us one Sunday. I think you

might like it!" "Why don't you bring your children to Sunday School, or Vacation Bible School – we have a wonderful program, with lots of young children, and I'm sure they would enjoy it." "Come to church and stay for coffee – it's a wonderful way to meet people and to talk in nice surroundings for an hour. I know you would like it. You're bound to meet someone you know from our neighborhood."

"Come to the band concert on Friday. I know you will enjoy the swing music." "Drop by our Thrift Store – you're sure to find something there you like, and if you want to do something for the community, donate some of your spare "stuff" – or better yet, some of your time." "Do you like barbecued chicken?" "Can you help us with our food drive? We're aiming to feed 5000 people this Thanksgiving!" "Have you seen our Christmas pageant? Our Easter pageant? I know you would like it!" "Come to our Easter sunrise service by the Duck Ponds and then to breakfast!" "Would you like to come to church with us on Christmas Eve for the candlelight service?"

If there is not one of these things you can say to a friend or family member or neighbor over the next year, I would be very surprised! Not all will say yes, but some will! You can take the small first step that brings people who need it into the circle of the Christian community. That is there they will meet Jesus, in the friendship and then the love and support and prayers of other people, in the words of Scripture, in singing a hymn they had almost forgotten, in the simple words of a children's sermon. Where his people are gathered, Jesus is there in the midst of them, and you have only to invite others in for them eventually to meet him themselves.

And you never know what God will make of the person you introduce to Jesus. He may be

your little brother, but he may change the world because of what God does in and through him. Your greatest legacy may be someone you bring to meet Jesus; someone whom God will use to do greater things than you or he or she could ever dream of. There was a Congregational Church that Marian and I were members of for some years in Massachusetts. It was not remarkable –an average church in an average suburb; reasonably affluent, but not known for its great programs or outreach or community impact. But among the people who met Jesus there was a man named Tom Phillips. You would never have guessed it from his modest manner, but Tom was the CEO of the Raytheon Corporation. One night in the mid 1970s, an old friend came to see him in great distress. His name was Charles Colson. That night Tom told Chuck how to meet Jesus. Chuck went on to found Prison Fellowship, and did more good for more prisoners in more countries than all the state rehabilitation programs had done in a century. All because of a modest Congregational Church where Tom met Jesus.

So this year, be an “Andrew” – the half-forgotten first-called disciple who gave himself to bringing other people to Jesus. And then pray and watch, as God does things that you cannot imagine.

Let us pray...

