

Glen Ridge Congregational Church
February 28, 2010 (Lent 2 - C)
John 1:35-42; "Come and See"
The Rev. Cynthia F. Reynolds

Let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Many of you probably remember when Val Tutson was here some time ago – leading us in worship through her wonderful storytelling. I know I won't forget the congregation singing Jesus Loves Me – in an unexpected rhythm yet - and then hearing her tell a story about communion – all of you listening to every word. Well, she also does a story about Jesus' baptism – she tells it from the viewpoint of a child who went with her little brother and her mother to the River Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist – a very special day for this little girl because among the crowd that day, Jesus came and was baptized himself. Some of you have seen that video too and you can't help but be deeply affected by it as you picture what that day looked like, the crowd gathered, and suddenly Jesus coming.

I've been picturing that day again as I've been thinking about disciple Andrew who we will consider this morning as a model for us. Because Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist and maybe he was there too in the crowd that day when Jesus came to the river.

Andrew and his friend John were fishermen by trade and the sons of two wealthy men who had formed a successful partnership. We don't know how Andrew and John came to follow John the Baptist but we can imagine they heard of John's ministry as they transported fish from Galilee to Jerusalem.

It was a period of hope for the Jews in Israel and many false Messiahs were springing up around the country as they impatiently waited for the promised Messiah who would relieve them of Roman occupation. But by the time the false messiahs made their names known in Jerusalem, the nervous Roman government would eliminate the problem to prevent their followings growing even larger. This was the atmosphere at the time of John the Baptist and his growing ministry. False messiahs had come and gone, hopeful Jews would run from one to another, in hopes of finding the one true one that the Lord God had sent to save them. Then, the most popular, crowd gathering prophet of God began preparing the way in the wilderness for the Lord – and John the Baptist became known throughout the country as the most popular preacher of his time.

Among those crowds surrounding John was Andrew. He must have been surprised to hear John the Baptist denying that he was the Messiah, to hear him speaking of the one to come who was the long awaited Messiah. There he was – standing at the River Jordan – hearing John say, "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And then, the next day he says again, "Look – here is the lamb of God." Can you imagine what Andrew might have been thinking as he watches and listens: I've been following John the Baptist but he says this Jesus is the true Messiah. There's something about Jesus – something different. Maybe this is the real deal. Maybe finally – this is the real deal.

The gospel of John tells us that Andrew and another disciple followed Jesus – and Jesus turns to them and says, “What are you looking for?”

And he answers, Rabbi – where are you staying?

Jesus tells him to come and see. And Andrew and the second disciple remained with Jesus the rest of that day. They must have talked with Jesus in great detail during their time with him because the next day Andrew recognized Jesus as the prophesized Messiah.

Now: our first lesson from Andrew for our discipleship journey: he excitedly left and hurried through a crowd of people and found his brother and told him, “We have found the Messiah”. And he brought Simon to Jesus. Andrew is known as the first to bring someone to Jesus.

And isn’t that our charge as disciples: to bring others to Jesus. Not just to bring people to worship, to church activities – but to bring them to Jesus. Who introduced you to Jesus? It was my confirmation class teacher many years ago, reinforced by my time at Silver Lake and at my home church. Who was it for you? And then who have you, through the grace of God, brought to meet Jesus?

I’ve been thinking about a woman I worked with in a group setting – at the beginning of our sessions, the members of the group would introduce themselves and say something about their religious tradition. This woman would always describe herself as spiritual, but not religious. We’d talk about it from time to time, but she stayed with the spiritual definition. When she moved on and we would no longer work together, I gave her a prayer shawl – told her to wrap it around her and feel God’s love surrounding her, no matter what.

After quite a while, I heard from her this Christmas – she’d become very ill – she wrote, “I have struggled greatly with my faith, got real mad at God, took off the cross I wore daily, and took down my collection of stained glass crosses and was really lost. But I just kept stumbling on your prayer shawl and felt like God was reminding me he was still there. I am better now and I’m so grateful. I had truly lost hope – but somehow this prayer shawl helped keep the little spark of faith and hope alive. Life is good. God is good.” She found the real deal too, didn’t she. She’s no longer describing herself as spiritual, but she finds herself, recognizes herself, bathed in the love and compassion and healing of God. Don’t we want that for those we know and love? Who have you, through the grace of God, brought to Jesus? We’re called just like Andrew to do just that.

But even Andrew didn’t leave everything and follow Jesus right away: even after Andrew and Peter were certain that Jesus was the Messiah, they did not fully become disciples of Jesus Christ until after the imprisonment of John the Baptist which was at least 40 days later. And it was then that Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee and saw Peter and Andrew in their boat, casting their nets into the sea – back to their old routine. But Jesus called to them, come with me and I will make you fishers of people. And immediately they gave up their jobs as fishermen and began following Jesus as his disciples. Maybe what that says to us is this: once we have experienced the love of God, once we have met Jesus, we are forever changed. There is no more life as it once was – there is a new “normal”, filled with blessings we can’t imagine.

And I think Andrew’s story is true for each of us: God is so very patient with us: God keeps trying to call us: and I believe we will, like Andrew, eventually heed the call,

if we have the ears to hear it and the courage to respond. Have you found that to be true? How does God call you to discipleship?

Later in the gospel of John we read about Andrew again: at the story of the feeding of the 5,000. There was a tremendous crowd gathered – as Philip was considering the cost of the food to feed so many, Andrew found a boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. He wondered how this food would be enough for so many – but we know the story from here. The five thousand were fed with limited food through an unlimited miracle of God – as much as they wanted with leftovers!

Here’s another lesson from Andrew for our own discipleship journey. Andrew paid attention to the people around him. In the midst of that huge crowd he saw the one young boy with his seemingly limited food and called forth that gift for the benefit of so many. It’s also striking that a child provided the means for the meal – we remember that children were not especially valued at the time – and isn’t that a message as well. Extraordinary gifts come from places we might not expect. We are called to be aware, aren’t we.

Then Andrew called that young man to meet Jesus just as he had been called. Don’t we have the same calling? To pay attention to those around us and call out their gifts for ministry? To name their gifts for ministry and encourage their participation? The greatest asset any church has are the people gathered, engaging in their ministry where they live their lives. All of us are gifted by God and we often need each other to discern what it is God has given us to share, to bring others to Jesus. It’s not what we say that matters so much, is it – it’s what we do. It’s seeing a need and responding to it. It’s looking around us and reaching out in perhaps unexpected ways.

Andrew is one of the few early disciples of Jesus about whom there are few legends. Rather than miraculous legends, the story of Andrew is the story of the disciples. We think of saints as extraordinary people and we may be surprised to find that even among the disciples there was one who lived a simple, everyday life. In fact, most saints have lived that simple, everyday life, sometimes miraculous, but only sometimes. Maybe Andrew is just another indication that we, too, can live simple, everyday lives and still be saints. I find a great deal of comfort in that as well as a challenge: that we are called to discipleship all the time. Andrew is someone we can identify with – he expressed doubt at times, didn’t always understand Jesus’ teaching, and he occasionally lacked faith. But he persisted. He stayed close to Jesus, watching and learning – asking questions, paying attention. He’s a role model for us, isn’t he.

We had a conversation in confirmation class this week about discipleship. Our young people will complete their formal studies in a few short weeks and become members of the church, will say yes to promises someone else made for them when they were baptized, most as infants. We talked about the difference in becoming a member of this church and becoming a disciple of Christ. We talked about who has mentored them, who has taught them, so far on this journey and we also talked about the fact that they too are mentoring others, teaching others, on their journey. That seemed to surprise them a bit but as they thought about it, they could see how their interactions with younger children and even some adults taught others what it means to be a disciple. As we talked about this, one of the students leaned back in his chair and said, “Wow – discipleship is hard! Becoming a member is easy but discipleship – that’s never ending! Confirmation isn’t the end is it.

No, it isn't – not for them and not for us. And even with the cost, it's worth it. By studying tradition we learn that Andrew preached in different regions, perhaps what we now know as Russia, and started a church in Constantinople. One account states that he refused to make sacrifices to heathen gods and was beaten and crucified in Patras.

We're not likely to be physically put to death for our beliefs – but our beliefs have to be important enough to us that we are willing to die to our former lives on our discipleship journey. Andrew left a lucrative fishing business to follow Jesus. But if it were not for those early disciples, we would not know Jesus ourselves. The question is, will future generations come to know Jesus by our testimony? Will we, like Andrew, call others to Christ? Will we pay attention and call out the God given gifts in other people? Are we still learning and growing in our knowledge of Jesus and sharing our faith with others in both word and deed? Let's continue our journey of discipleship, together.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, in your kindness hear our petitions. You called Andrew the apostle to preach the gospel and guide your church in faith. May he always be our friend in your presence to help us with his prayers. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy spirit, now and always. Amen.