

Called by Name: Andrew and the Action of Invitation

A sermon by Rev. Aaron Fulp-Eickstaedt
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John 1:29-42, Mark 1:14-20

Today the sermon series we started last week on the disciples continues with a look at Andrew, the first disciple mentioned in the book of John. Known almost solely for being Simon Peter's brother in the other gospels (you wonder if he might have developed a bit of a complex about that!), Andrew actually has a few speaking parts in the fourth gospel, which notes that he was a disciple of John the Baptist before he ever met Jesus. In fact, as you'll hear, John's gospel claims that Andrew was the one who introduced his brother to the Lord, the one he called the Messiah.

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

Our second reading for today is from the first chapter of Mark's gospel, which gives us another take on the call of Andrew.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

I don't know about you, but I've always been just a little dubious about—and uncomfortable with—how quickly the four fishermen in the story from Mark's gospel leave behind their boats and their nets to follow Jesus. You know. *It all just happens so fast.* Jesus passes by the Sea of Galilee, sees Simon and Andrew, calls them to come and follow him and he will make them fish for people. And immediately—*immediately*, do not pass go, do not collect \$200, *immediately*—they leave their nets

and follow. Then James and John do the same. They leave their father and follow, too. They just *go*. There's not a lot of context given for why they drop everything and go.

They just do. We're left to wonder, "Why?" Was it really as out of the blue as it seemed or had they already seen and heard Jesus preaching in Galilee and been impressed by his presence and his message? Had the four simply grown tired of fishing for fish? Or decided they weren't just very good at it? Were they trying to get away from something? Or just glad Jesus saw potential in them? More importantly, is this story supposed to be some sort of model for what every would-be follower of Jesus should do? To be ready to leave everything—jobs and families and routines—behind at a moment's notice? If so, that's a big ask. That's not how most people I know operate.

John's gospel gives us a different perspective on their call, and it does so by providing some backstory. It all starts with Andrew. Andrew, known in the other gospels simply for being Simon Peter's brother, is in John what the Greek Orthodox tradition refers to as the *protokletos*, or the first-called.

Andrew is not in a boat or anywhere near the Sea of Galilee when he first encounters Jesus. Instead, he's almost certainly down in Judea near the Jordan River where John the Baptist is teaching and baptizing, because the story says that Andrew is one of John's disciples to start off with. Given that, one can reasonably assume that Andrew is out in the wilderness learning from John when, one day, his teacher sees Jesus and points to him and says, "Here is the guy I've been talking about. I've been telling you about this guy. This is the Lamb of God."

Andrew's response to this is a little more tentative than Mark's depiction of him and his brother bouncing out of the boat and leaving their nets behind when Jesus calls them. No, this is more gradual. As I see it in my mind's eye, Andrew and one of the Baptizer's other disciples start to kind of cautiously sidle along behind Jesus, maybe just far enough back that they hope they're not going to be detected. When Jesus, sensing their presence, turns and asks them what they're looking for—what they're seeking—they respond by asking him where he's staying—where he abides. Jesus replies, "Come and see." (not 'come and follow me,' but 'come and see') and that's exactly what they do. They come and remain with him there and they learn about Jesus.

Then after staying with Jesus all day, Andrew becomes the first evangelist, finding his brother Simon and telling him, "We have found the Messiah!" And when Andrew brings his brother to meet him, Jesus calls Simon *Cephas*, which is translated Peter, which means the Rock, and then Andrew—whose personality is not as big and brassy as Peter's—then kind of fades into the background. Unlike the other three fishermen—Peter, James, and John—who are always going off in a threesome to be with Jesus, Andrew is not part of Jesus' inner circle. Poor Andrew.

The accounts of the call of Andrew are so different, aren't they? Mark, concerned with urgency of response and the primacy of Peter, introduces us to Andrew in Galilee, with his brother Simon Peter listed first, and the two of them immediately getting out of their boat to follow, and then Peter being the first to call Jesus Messiah. Only after seven whole chapters filled with miracles and teachings does Peter figure out and say that Jesus is the Messiah. In Mark's gospel, you follow, *then* you learn who Jesus is.

John's Gospel, on the other hand, so focused on understanding who Jesus is, has the call of Andrew happen in Judea, with *Andrew* appearing first, and *Andrew* figuring out that Jesus is the Messiah early on after he comes and sees for himself, and *Andrew* finding Simon Peter and telling him about Jesus. In John, you learn who Jesus is and *then* you follow.

Commentators have tried to reconcile these accounts by saying that maybe Andrew and Simon Peter met Jesus in Judea before he called them along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, but I'm not sure we have to make Mark's version and John's version sync up perfectly. If that's important to you, you can do it. But I don't think we need to. Because what Mark's version and John's version are both about is responding to the God we know in Jesus Christ.

I think sometimes faithful response is like jumping off the high dive, taking a risk, getting out of the boat when Jesus calls and following and learning on your way after you've jumped that God provides as you go.

And sometimes faithful response is more like dipping a toe in the water and gradually wading in and coming to trust the more you learn about who God is.

Sometimes faithful response is of the high-dive variety, moving forward like the great contemplative Thomas Merton, who prayed a now-famous prayer: *"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."* That's a prayer that you pray when you're jumping off the high dive.

But sometimes faithful response is of the toe-dip, slowly wade-in variety. It involves a more gradual lead-up, learning and exploring and coming to see for yourself before you step out on the road. Gay Lee Einstein—a former member and then associate pastor here—shared in a sermon one time that she started out up in the balcony, coming to worship, listening to sermons, being part of classes, taking everything in. Then over time she felt herself pulled down out of the balcony onto the lower level and then out into seminary and up to the pulpit and out into ordained ministry. Sometimes it's the high dive, sometimes it's you dip your toe in and you go a little further and a little further and at a certain point you come down from the balcony.

Responding to God doesn't mean you have to go to seminary--thank you, Jesus—though if you're thinking about that, don't let me discourage you. You can keep your spot in the balcony or on the back row and still respond to God's call. But Andrew—in both Mark's gospel and John's gospel—shows us that whether you follow and learn on the way, or learn and then take the steps to follow, eventually faithfulness to the God we know in Christ requires committing to step out in faith. It means taking a chance, taking a risk, making a move.

I, for one, so often feel drawn to John's version of Andrew. Simon Peter's brother responds to Jesus call to come and see before he goes out and follows. He checks this guy out, he goes to the classes, he kicks the tires, but then he's excited enough to tell his brother what he's found and to sign up to follow.

Presbyterians, being Reformed and all, don't have patron saints. But if we did, I think ours would be the disciple Andrew. He is, after all, the patron saint of Scotland, the birth place of the Presbyterian tradition. The x-shaped cross associated with Andrew and the way he was martyred adorns the Scottish flag.

But there's a deeper reason I'd link Andrew to folks like us at Immanuel and to other Presbyterians as well. On the one hand, he's the one we meet in John, a toe-dipper, a seeker. He wants to learn as much as possible. He's looked over the trifold Spirituality and Learning brochure and marked the opportunities he wants to attend. He's excited about the new insights a sermon or a class can bring. He's coming to see for himself before he responds.

On the other hand, Andrew is the guy we meet in Mark, who does get out of the boat to follow Jesus in the way of catching people in the net of God's love, and even if he fades into the background while other people are more vocal and visible in the work, he just keeps doing it. Showing up to volunteer for the Hypo Shelter, loading the truck for SHARE, putting together kits for the veterans, buying gifts for the tag tree family, making meals for the grieving parishioners. Andrew just shows up and he does it, catching people in the net of God's love on the way, even though he doesn't get the attention that his brother Simon Peter does.

When we're at our best, Immanuel, we're a little—or a lot—of both versions of Andrew. All rolled into one.

A few final comments about what we can learn from the portrayals of Andrew in Mark and in John.

The first is this. In both stories, eventually the rubber meets the road and you must respond or not to Jesus' call to love and serve—whether immediately or after a period of exploration, you've got to respond.

Second, in both stories, there's a lot of learning ahead for Andrew and the disciples. In John, he knows who Jesus is before he signs up to go and tell others, but that doesn't mean there isn't still more to learn on the way. Like when Jesus is about to feed the five thousand and Andrew and the others don't know where they're going to find food enough to do it. It is Andrew who says, "There's a boy here with five loaves and two wee fish, but what are they among so many?" And Andrew, who already understands that Jesus is the Messiah, is stunned again at the miracle of how Jesus can take what seems to be so little and make it enough.

A third thing, and this is why I almost decided that Andrew shouldn't be the patron saint of Presbyterians after all, is that what Andrew does in both Mark and John is that he *moves from being invited to becoming an inviter*. He tells his brother that he's found the Messiah. He becomes a fisher of people. A Presbyterian patron saint does that! Can you imagine it? A *Presbyterian* going out to tell other people about who Jesus is and what Jesus is doing in our midst as the church is being the church both inside and outside of the doors.

Here's a joke for you. What happens when you cross a Presbyterian with a Jehovah's Witness? Anybody know? That's right. Somebody who knocks on doors and doesn't know what to say.

Well, sons and daughters of Andrew, I know that you know what to say.

In Jesus' name. Amen.