Sharing the Good News

Second in the series “A Place to Belong”

# Scripture: John 1:35-51

# Key thought: The example of Andrew and Philip inspires us to invite others to meet Jesus.

# Intro:

Our Scripture lesson today is one that is often encountered in Sunday School lessons for children, yet it is one that contains a powerful example for adults as well. We can learn so much from the events surrounding the calling of the first disciples.

# Jesus invited them to follow.

## Jesus initiated the call to follow

The first observation we make is that both in the calling of Andrew and in the calling of Philip, Jesus made the initiating move. This underlines a subtle yet crucial theological point that we need to note. We as humans think that we are seeking God. And maybe we are. But we always find that there is an initiative from God’s side that has kicked off the process. We have been the recipients of what I term, “calling grace.”

In the case of Andrew, he was one of those who heard John the Baptist recommend Jesus as “The Lamb of God.” He and another disciple who is not identified started walking after Jesus, probably walking behind him out of respect for a rabbi. Jesus then takes the initiative and turns around, acknowledging their following him and begins the conversation. That conversation resulted in Andrew and the other disciple (who is probably John the writer) spending a day with Jesus.

In the case of Philip, we do not get the background story. The text simply says, “Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”” (John 1:43). Jesus’ initiative is shown both in whatever actions it took to find Philip and in Jesus’ direct invitation for Philip to follow him.

Jesus had taught that,

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,” John 6:44 NIV

Jesus’ initiative in calling his disciples illustrates how the Holy Spirit takes initiative in our lives to call us to follow Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit that makes us aware of our need to become a follower of Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us feel that it is a good and desirable thing to follow Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit that sorts out our motives as Jesus did to Andrew with the piercing question, “What are you looking for?” It is the Holy Spirit that creates in us the sense of “ought” which helps us to see that it is a right and proper thing and an urgent thing to begin to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

# They responded by following Jesus.

## Jesus’ call is powerful

The second observation I make is that both Andrew and Philip quickly and resolutely to follow Jesus. When we truly hear the call of Jesus in our lives, it is hard to turn down. Yes, we can turn him down; he respects our free will. But the sweetness of his call, the power of his leadership, the love we sense in his presence, all draw us strongly to him even as they did Andrew and Philip.

## Jesus’ call comes to each uniquely

I also note that in the stories of the four people in this passage who responded to Jesus call to become a disciple, no two were alike. This illustrates another key point. God deals with each of us individually. Andrew had heard a message from a preacher, John the Baptist, and he was greatly influenced by it. Jesus said to him, “Come and see.”

I think “Come and see” is part of Jesus’ invitation to us today as well. He invites us to come to him and see if it is not true that he will give our souls rest as he has promised. He invites us to come and see if he will not teach us to love and bequeath to us joy as he has said. “Come and see” and you will find that I am gentle in heart. (Matt. 11:28, 29).

As for Philip, perhaps he had heard John the Baptist or Jesus before, we are not told. What we have here is that Philip was persuaded by the simple presence of Jesus and the words, “Follow me.” Jesus still reaches out to us with that the call, “Follow me!” He calls in churches today, in Bible study classes and through personal conversations, and in quiet moments. Our natural lodestar is our own self-interest. But Jesus lures us gently to choose a higher destiny. “Follow me,” he whispers to our soul.

The Bible says that Jesus looked at Simon when he came with Andrew. The Greek word speaks of an intense and discerning gaze, the kind that sees into who you are. That’s what happens when we come to Jesus, we feel our secrets are disclosed before the searching eyes of God’s Spirit. It is that gaze that urges us to repentance. Then to Simon, Jesus spoke encouraging words about his future and gave him a different name, Cephas, which is translated as Peter. A change of name speaks for a transformed character. Peter was becoming a different person because of Jesus. It is so like Jesus, after he has brought us to repentance, then he heals us, renews us and sets us on a stronger, higher path than we were on before, with loftier goals.

For Nathanael, Jesus used a different approach. First he complemented Nathaniel. We could learn a lot from Jesus just from the standpoint of human relations. Complements are always a good way to help in personal relationships but this was no ordinary complement. When we read the text we don’t immediately get the power behind it. Jesus was quoting from the second half of a verse in Psalms when he complemented Nathanael.

Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit. Ps 32:2 NIV

Apparently Nathaniel was a man who understood the Scriptures and he recognized the complement immediately. Then, Jesus displayed a bit of prophetic supernatural knowledge concerning where Nathanael had been-under the fig tree. The fig tree was a proverbial place of meditation upon Scripture. Jesus was telling Nathaniel that he really did know what kind of man he was. Jesus knows us as well. He knows our possibilities. He knows the places we need to change. Jesus through his Holy Spirit, speaks to each one of us differently. The uses our own experiences, different influences, and tailors his approach to us according to our own personalities. But the essence of his message is the same, “Follow me.” Finally, Jesus gave Nathaniel words of promise. They also were from an Old Testament story, the story of Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:12, 13). Jesus has given us many great and precious promises as well.

# They immediately recommended Jesus to someone else.

There are three things I notice about how Andrew and Philip reacted to coming to know Jesus.

## They looked for someone to invite to Jesus

This is the key point that I wanted to make today. Andrew and Philip both served as wonderful examples for us in one of the key aspects of discipleship. Too often we get the idea that being a disciple of Jesus is knowing the Apostle’s Creed, affirming personally the creed, and at least frequently showing up to recite the creed in one form or another. Now all those ideas are involved. Discipleship is knowing about Jesus which the Apostles Creed and other creeds describe. For sure, discipleship involves personally deciding to follow Jesus and believe in him as our Savior and Lord. And anyone who believes in him, will worship him regularly with other Christians. So those are all good. But there’s something missing. What is missing is exactly what Andrew and Philip exemplify. It is inviting others to be disciples. It is defining a disciple not only has one who does all the above but also as a Great Commission Christian.

Concerning Andrew, did you know that there only three times in the Gospels when Andrew seems to be at the center of the story? Our text of this morning is one of them. The second incident is in John chapter 6:8, 9. In this incident also, Andrew brings someone to Jesus. This is the story of the boy with the five loaves and the two fish. I’m sure you’ve read the story but you probably didn’t remember which disciple it was that brought forward the boy with the five loaves and the two fish. It was Andrew. The third time that we see Andrew as the center of the story is in John 12:22. According to that story some Greeks came up to the disciples to ask if they could see Jesus. The Bible tells us that they came first to Philip, probably because he was from Bethsaida, which was at the north of Galilee likely near the territory from which the Greeks may have come. But for some reason Philip did not want to take the Greeks to Jesus himself. Instead he brought them to Andrew. Then Andrew and Philip took the Greek inquirers to Jesus. So again Andrew as well as Philip are involved in bringing inquirers to Jesus.

You recall that Jesus gave to his disciples the command that we call the Great Commission. It is the marching orders for all of us who call ourselves disciples. If we are a disciple, we must be participating in fulfilling this command in some ways.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:18-20

Unfortunately, nothing is more common today than to find Christians who, as Jesus put it, hide their light under a bushel. They are studiously keeping their faith to themselves. By doing so, they are not being good stewards of their influence to help others come to know Jesus. They are not being Great Commission Christians in the model of Andrew and Philip.

So I would like us this morning to be reminded by Andrew and Philip that part of discipleship is being people who use our influence to help others find Jesus. Sometimes this will mean inviting them into a conversation about Jesus. Sometimes it will mean inviting them to church. I hope there are some who you will feel you should invite to next Sunday’s “A Place to Belong” special day at our church. Always it will mean praying for others about their spiritual needs. Sometimes it will mean helping people who are missionaries in other cultures, teaching people about Jesus.

## They spoke from their own experience

The second thing I note about Andrew and Philip is how they did this. What was their method in being a Great Commission Christian? Harrison asked this question last week. He said, “We all want to be good disciples, but how do we begin the conversation?” Andrew and Philip provide one of the answers. Andrew went to his brother Simon and told him what he thought about Jesus. He said, “We have found the Messiah.” (Jn. 1:41) Andrew, after finding Nathanael who we knew was a student of the Old Testament, said to him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law.” (Jn. 1:45) When we begin with our own experience, our own testimony, people will listen because they automatically relate to it. If it could happen to us, it could happen to them.

How do we maximize our ability to share our own experience of what Christ has done for us? One way is think about how Jesus has made a difference in your life. Think about how something was before you met Jesus, and how it’s different now that you know Jesus. How did Jesus make a difference? You learn to tell this short personal story simply. Actually most of us have many testimonies relating to different parts of our lives that Jesus has affected in awesome ways.

Another way to share our own spiritual lives is to share a particular’s faith experience that meant a lot to us. Some people have had very unusual spiritual experiences that they can share. But for most of us, our experiences relate to high points in services and in prayers and in times alone with God. In these moments God gave us insights or perspectives which strengthened us or relieved our guilt or give us peace in a way that was almost palpable. Those are the kind of moments to talk about.

As we mentioned last week, if we are sensitive to when the testimony that we are giving is relevant to the need of the person that were talking to, then the result can be very powerful. But remember, the ultimate results are always up to the Holy Spirit.

## They recommended Jesus

Our job is to do what Philip and Andrew did, they recommended Jesus. We make a grave mistake if we think that our job is to know the answers. It is not. People know we don’t have all the answers. What they want to hear is about our story of our friendship with Jesus.

At this point it is important to note the weakness of many contemporary media personal faith stories. They seem to focus more on the person involved, and more on the drama of the situation than they do on Jesus who is the answer for our needs. We need to remember that the ultimate goal of our speaking up, the ultimate goal of our using our influence is to recommend Jesus to other people.

This is also an important point for those who would say, “Well I recommend Jesus just by my behavior.” I would say that certainly our behavior should speak well of the one whom we follow. But people will not necessarily know the crucial link unless we personally and vocally recommend Jesus. There are many people who act well who do not confess Christ. So it is necessary for us to give testimony of the cause of the connection between our behavior and our faith. For it is true as Peter wrote that it is our God who has, “Given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).