

Behind the Scenes

John 1:29-42

First Presbyterian Church

January 29, 2020

Introduction

John's Gospel is – let's just say – a little different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And one of the ways we know this is that often in the Gospel of John there are some words and phrases and even questions that have double meanings. More on that later. This morning's reading takes us to the wilderness where John has been baptizing... and takes place in the days immediately after John has baptized Jesus.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I 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.' ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." ³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When 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?" ³⁹He 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. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He 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).

Sermon

When you think of the twelve disciples, who do you think of first? I'm guessing the most famous one, right? Simon Peter. And when we think of Peter, we remember at least three stories. We remember when he promised, "I won't deny you. I won't deny you. I WILL NOT deny you." And then he did. Or, he's up on the Mount of Transfiguration... where, with James and John, he witnessed Jesus transfigured before them with Moses and Elijah. And Peter, who like some of us suffered from "foot-in-mouth" disease... Peter suggests they build a small house for each. Or maybe we think of Jesus coming to them walking on the water... and Peter... passionate, impetuous, Peter... is the only disciple to risk getting out of the boat (which is to his credit) ... but he still got wet. Apparently, people whose faith falters when they're scared and who speak before they think and who even deny Jesus... are his disciples.

Ok, there's Peter... who else? There are James and John – already mentioned them. They're called the "Sons of Thunder" either because they had really bad tempers or they expected God would come with thunderous judgment on the enemies of Jesus. James and John were brothers... both fishermen... they were with him on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane. Apparently, people with hot tempers also are Jesus' disciples.

OK, who else? How about Matthew? Matthew may have been a tax collector... at least that's what we've always thought... and when we think of tax collectors in Jesus day, we think of Jews who took advantage of other Jews with Rome's permission. So, you don't want to borrow money or buy a used car from a guy like Matthew because he will cheat you. Yet, even folks like Matthew become disciples.

Let's see... which of the other disciples can you name? How about Thomas? Yeah, we all know Doubting Thomas and maybe even identify with him. Living in a scientific age... questioning when bad things happen to good people... we all have doubts and questions and it's good to know that the Thomas's of life also are disciples.

OK, anybody else? Any other disciples that you know? How about Andrew... did anybody think of Andrew? Because you see him every day. Andrew checks you out at the grocery store or comes out to fix your furnace when it breaks. Andrew is the Uber driver who picks you up at the airport or is sitting there at the stoplight at 5:00 when you are coming home from work; he is in the car next to you, catching up on the news. Andrew manages the produce department at Food Lion... Andrew is the teller at the bank. Andrew doesn't have President or CEO or Executive Director after his name... he is listed under the heading "Support Staff." Yet, Andrew is absolutely essential to make the world work. Andrew is absolutely essential to make the church work. So, this morning let's imagine someone like Andrew... and let's learn what can from him.

The first thing is that Andrew was Simon Peter's little brother. So immediately we think of a kid growing up in his big brother's shadow – always in second place... always wearing hand-me-downs... always being picked on. Anytime the two brothers would play, guess who made the rules? Anytime there was an extra serving of hummus and pita, guess who got it? Even in the Gospels, Andrew is referred to as "Simon Peter's brother." I had never really noticed this before - there are two sets of brothers among the disciples – James and John... and Peter and Andrew. But the BIG THREE disciples – (the ones Jesus had with him for all the big events)- were Peter, James and John. Where was Andrew on the Mount of Transfiguration? Where was Andrew at the Garden of Gethsemane? Andrew wasn't there. Because Andrew was always behind the scenes.

This morning I want to tell you three stories from the life of Andrew... all three on the same theme. First story. Before Andrew was a disciple of Jesus, he was a disciple of John the Baptist. John was out there in the wilderness, some fifty miles from the capital of Jerusalem. He was a super strict Jew - no drinking, smoking, dancing... no nothing!

He was all about preaching and baptizing out there in the wilderness... and Andrew was his disciple. As we heard last Sunday, Jesus went out to the wilderness to be baptized by John... and the next day Jesus walked by and John said, "Andrew, there's the one... the one who is walking there. He's the lamb of God... and he will change the world."

Andrew approached Jesus and Jesus asked him a question: "What are you looking for?" Now, remember in John's gospel everything has a double meaning... so "what are you looking for?" meant "Andrew, what are you really searching for in life? What do you really want out of life? It's a question Jesus asks you as well: "Andrew, what will make you truly happy?" Andrew responded to Jesus' question with one of his own: "Where are you staying?" Again, he doesn't mean, "Hey, are you at the Holiday Inn or the Ramada?" He means, "Who are you, Jesus? Who are your people? What are you about? Where are you staying?"

And Jesus answered, "Come and see." Come and see. And Andrew did – all told, he spent the next twenty-four hours with Jesus... and what I would give to know what they talked about. What we do know is that sometime in those twenty-four hours... 24 hours in the presence of Jesus... something happened inside of Andrew... and he became Christ's disciple.

First thing the next morning, he went and found his big bro – THE big bro to whom he'd always played second fiddle... whose "hand-me-downs" he had worn. Andrew must not have resented Peter too awful much because the first thing he did in the morning was to go and find him. The Bible says, and I quote, "Andrew brought Simon to Jesus." What a wonderful line... "Andrew brought Simon to Jesus" because he sensed that if he brought his brother to Jesus, chances were good that he, too, would follow... and that's precisely what happened. Andrew brought his brother to Jesus... and Simon gave his life to Christ. So, in this first story about Andrew, we learn that this average guy... this "behind-the-scenes-guy" had a gift... a real knack for introducing people to the Lord... beginning with his big brother.

Moving on to the second story, we hear about two Greeks who are passing through Jerusalem. Jerusalem was on the main highway between Rome and Egypt... folks were always passing through... and it just so happened that these two Greeks overheard Jesus preach. After the sermon they came up to Phillip and said, "We would like to meet Jesus." And what did Phillip do? He took the two Greeks over to Andrew and said, "Would you introduce them to Jesus?" which Andrew was glad to do, and those two Greeks also became disciples of Christ. So, our second story is on the same theme: that is, Andrew was that "behind-the-scenes" person who introduced people to Jesus.

And finally, the third story. Do you remember the little boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish? Imagine a huge lawn sloping down toward the Sea of Galilee and several thousand people gathered on that lawn. Jesus had just finished his sermon, and everybody was hungry (just like you guys about now) but there were no Bojangles nearby and no Uber Eats or Grub Hub to deliver – only this little boy with five loaves and two fish in his lunchbox. Of course, Jesus took the bread... broke it... and passed it out to the five thousand... and there were twelve baskets left over.

Now, what part of the story did I leave out? The part that's almost always left out... the part about how the little boy got to meet Jesus. Who was it that knew about the little boy and brought him to meet Jesus? It was Andrew.

So, the sermon for today is not about Simon Peter who preached and three thousand were baptized in one day. It's not about James, the great leader and martyr of the Jerusalem church. It's not about John who was present for all of the really big events in the gospel story. No, today's sermon is about the bus driver, the barber, the receptionist, the teller at the bank... it's about the one who is always behind-the-scenes introducing people to Jesus Christ. And what I want to suggest to you is that throughout the history of the church there have been 10,000 Andrews for every single Peter, James and John... 10,000 faithful disciples "behind-the-scenes" for every Peter, James and John who are out front. And it is THESE people who are absolutely essential to the work of the kingdom of God.

Ya'll have no doubt heard that the church in North America is declining – in membership, influence, impact – declining. The reasons for this are many and complex, but at least one big reason is how frightened you and I are by the word "evangelism." For some of us, this fear comes from having been on the receiving end of someone else's bad evangelism. If you've ever been to Oktoberfest, you know what I mean. For others of us, it's the conviction that religion isn't something polite people talk about... or that faith is something private... or simply the desire NOT to be perceived as one of THOSE people. Whatever the reason, most of us (ME included) not only have almost no experience in evangelism, we are downright scared of it. So, as I'm finishing up here, I want to say a few more words and then I want us to do something together. My takeaway from today's sermon (and yes, each week we preachers take something away as well) ... my takeaway is that when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, our primary job is to see and to share... not to threaten or coerce... not to intimidate or cajole... it's simply to see and to share. That's what Andrew does – he sees and then he shares - which is at its heart, what evangelism is: noticing what God is doing in our lives and our church... sharing that with others when the time is right and the Spirit creates an opening... and inviting them to "come and see" for themselves. Yet, realizing that EVEN THAT makes us nervous, it's clear to me that most of us are going to need some practice. So, I'm inviting you to turn to your neighbor (preferably someone you are not related to) turn to your neighbor and take one minute each to share one reason, you like this church (and if you have to lie, then lie) but share one reason you like to come to this church. OK, go!

Finally, this. Some of you know that a few years back, long-time FPC members, Bob and Kandi Peterson, sold their house just down from the church and moved into something a little less demanding. When 3 years ago, Terry and Chris Appenzeller moved in two doors down from them, Bob and Kandi welcomed them to the neighborhood and eventually invited them to church. Now, I want to be clear - inviting someone to church is not exactly the same thing as inviting them into a relationship with Jesus. BUT, when the church is at its best, I believe they are closely related. When this church is at its best, this is a place where people can meet the Lord. Well, at the Peterson's invitation Terry and Chris began attending on Sundays and Wednesday evenings... and eventually they joined us and have become very active members.

Fast forward to the present – precisely three years after the Appenzeller’s moved in... and five days before this past Christmas... JOE AND GINNY CLAY moved into the home BETWEEN the Peterson’s and the Appenzeller’s – can you see where this is going? Just imagine being completely surrounded by First Presbyterians! THEY DON’T HAVE A CHANCE! The point is that the Peterson’s “saw and shared” with the Appenzeller’s. They know what Jesus means to them... they know what this church means to them... and they simply shared that with their new neighbor. And now both the Peterson’s and the Appenzeller’s are sharing that with the Clay’s. Whether Joe and Ginny become members of FPC, or some other church is not the point...

We certainly hope it’s FPC, but we want them to find the right fit for their family. The point is “seeing and sharing” ... just like Andrew did. It’s something we ALL can do.

PRAYER

God, today we thank you for those like Andrew, who serve you faithfully in so many ways; offering their time and energy behind the scenes to the work of this church and your kingdom. We ask you to give us eyes to really see the people around us... help us to notice how you are at work in us and others... prompt us to share what you and your church means to us... and make us bold to invite others to come and see who you are... who your people are... and where you live. May this church be a place where all people can come and meet you.