

Nicknames

John 1:29-42

1/29/20

Nicknames have been a reoccurring topic
in our household lately.

We were talking with some friends
over a pizza the other night about names
and about our friends who go by nicknames
or nickname-like versions of their given names:
for instance, Will, Bill, Billy, Jim, Whit:
outright nick names, like our daughter's friend, Jet,
and of course, Shug—sweet ole Garland,
Katherine and Stuart's daughter
who we call Shug,
for those of you who don't know.

And of course, my spouse, Tripp,
goes by a nickname.

Our older daughter, Arlie,
also goes by her nickname.

Our newest neighbor across the street,
came over with her daughter
to sell us Girl Scout cookies last Sunday
when the weather was so beautiful.

It was a good strategy
to bring over all those cookie boxes in a wagon
on a week when I had vowed
to give up sugar.

So, while taking our cookie order,
our neighbor asked for our phone numbers,
so that whenever either of us where out of town,
we could let each other know
to keep an eye on the house and what not.
So, we gave our numbers to her
and she asked Tripp
if his name was spelled with one "p" or two.
And then she asked if 'Tripp,'
was his real name.

So, he explained that it was not,
but he'd always gone by his nickname
and unable to stay quiet I butted in with
"well, he's a third,
so that's why they call him Tripp."
This is apparently a southerner rule
—as our neighbor from Colorado
gave me a side eye
as though she'd never heard
of this custom before.

Jesus had a couple of nicknames
—though the real term I suppose
would be titles.
Emmanuel for one,
Christ is another.

John the gospel writer tells us
that John the baptizer
gave Jesus a nickname too,
the Lamb of God:
and not only that,
there is an addendum to the nickname,
the One who takes away the sin of the world.
That's a mouthful to proclaim
every time Jesus walks
by but that is exactly what John does.
You know, I think nicknames
might be biblical.
Because even the disciples have nicknames.

When you think about Jesus's disciples
who are the ones we think of first?
Simon Peter, right?
Good ole, no filter, passionate, devoted, Peter.
Which of course is the nickname
Jesus gives him;
he is Simon son of John,
and Jesus dubs him, Cephas or Peter,
which means rock.

Maybe when you try to think of other disciples
you think of the brothers James and John next,
the sons of Zebedee,
nicknamed, *the sons of thunder*
because of their hot-headed temperaments.
Good to know that those of us
with quick tempers
have a place in God's kingdom.

Then do we think of the disciple, Matthew?
Who also had the nickname or another name,
Levi—remember he was the tax collector.
Okay, we're up to 4 disciples.

Who is next?

Thomas, who is nicknamed the twin
in the Bible
but who we have nicknamed,
Doubting Thomas.
Thomas gets a bad rap
for stating what we'd all say,
I won't believe it until I see it.

And then maybe you'd think of Judas
—the disciple who is nicknamed the betrayer.
Judas doesn't make it into
our baby naming books anymore
and no one wants the nickname, the betrayer.

Can you think of anymore?
Peter, James, John, Matthew, Thomas, Judas
...what about Andrew?
Do we think of him when we list the disciples?

He is not as famous as: brother of Simon Peter.
Whereas Peter is mentioned throughout the gospel,
his brother Andrew
is only named in a few stories.

When Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story,
Andrew and Simon Peter were fisherman.
In the gospels of Matthew and Mark,
they are called at the same time
—Jesus spots them by the sea of Galilee fishing
and implores them to follow him
and he will make them fishers of people.
They, *together*, drop their nets
and follow Jesus.

In Luke, Andrew is not named
until after the calling of Simon Peter
when Jesus prays on a mountain top
and calling all the disciples
who are following him,
Luke says he names 12
whom are also called as apostles,
and Andrew is named as one of them.

John's gospel is different
—I know you aren't surprised.
In this gospel,
Andrew is one of John the Baptist's disciples;
no fishing mentioned.
And here according to John the gospel writer,
Andrew is one of the first people
to follow Jesus.

“The next day John again
was standing with two of his own 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
...One of the two
who heard John speak and followed him,
was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.”
(John 1:35-36, 40)

Another story John tells,
is likely a familiar story to some of us,
and yet I bet most of us missed
the detail concerning Andrew.
Remember the large crowd that followed Jesus;
followed him to the point
that they forgot to eat
and wound up hungry and tired on a hillside?
I think it was a Sunday
because all the Chick Fil-A's were closed.

John 6 says,

“After this Jesus went
to the other side of the Sea of Galilee,
also called the Sea of Tiberias.

²A large crowd kept following Jesus,
because they saw the signs
that he was doing for the sick.

³Jesus went up the mountain
and sat down there with his disciples...

⁵When he looked up
and saw a large crowd coming toward him,
Jesus said to Philip,

“Where are we to buy bread
for these people to eat?”

⁶He said this to test him,
for he himself knew
what he was going to do.

⁷Philip answered him,
“Six months' wages
would not buy enough bread
for each of them to get a little.”

⁸One of his disciples, **Andrew**,
Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

⁹“There is a boy here
who has five barley loaves and two fish.”

And again, later in John chapter 12,
everybody was in Jerusalem
getting ready for Passover.

Jesus would have made a great
Baptist or a Pentecostal
because he never gave up
an opportunity to preach or testify.

He must have been out preaching outside,
on the Temple steps.

There were people from all over in town
and John says some Greeks
who were in Jerusalem for Passover
heard Jesus preaching
and had to meet him,
had to shake his hand
and have him sign their advance copy of 'the book'.

Of course, after he preached Jesus slips back
to where he and the disciples were all staying
and these Greeks can't find him.

But they spot Philip with his WWJD t-shirt on
and ask if they can see Jesus.

And who does Philip go get?

Andrew... and the two of them
bring those Greeks to Jesus.

Did you know
that Andrew was featured
in those bible stories?

We know the feeding of the 5000 pretty well,
but I didn't know that in John,
Andrew found the boy with loaves and fishes.

I knew about Jesus going to Jerusalem near Passover,
but I didn't remember
that when the Gentiles asked about seeing Jesus,
Andrew was the one leads to see Christ.

And I didn't remember that Andrew
was the one
who leads Peter to his Lord.

For whatever reason,
we just don't often think of Andrew specifically
when we think of the disciples.
And we certainly don't think of him
as one of *the first*
—*the first*
to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah!
And the first to leave everything to follow him.
Despite our tendency to look over Andrew,
he plays an important part
in the gospel's message.
Because of his obscurity
coupled with his importance,
Andrew is sometimes called
the patron saint of the
behind-the-scenes.

Think about it,
in each of these stories,
most of us wouldn't pick out Andrew
as the one we remember;
yet without Andrew
—would Simon Peter have followed Christ?
Andrew doesn't try to convince Simon Peter
to follow Jesus,
he just simply says,
we have found the Messiah.

John gospel says, with brotherly tenderness,
Andrew brought Simon to Jesus.
How would the gospel have turned out
without Andrew bringing his older brother
Simon Peter to Jesus?

Without Andrew
how would the little boy,
with his meager Sunday lunch,
ever have found his way
through all those hungry people?

If you think our supper line is bad
on a Wednesday night at 5:35
when the food isn't out yet:
can you imagine 5000 of us waiting
for Matt's baked chicken
and biscuits with sausage gravy?
Talk about a hungry hillside
—yet there was Andrew
with what would turn into a miracle.

Andrew is indeed behind the scenes.

This disciple,
well I think he is like many of you,
working diligently and quietly.
He, like you,
is the kind of disciple that brings people to Jesus
—but not by preaching a sermon
in the pulpit
or making the correct theological points
to the whole spin class—
he's in the locker room afterwards
offering to help a newly divorced dad
move next Saturday.

Acts says that Andrew's brother Peter
preached a sermon

and 3000 people were converted
on the spot.

But that is too showy for Andrew.

No, Andrew is the one who pays attention
and works for the kingdom quietly and diligently.
He is not the Martin Luther King Jr.
of the Civil Rights Movement
—he is the Bayard Rustin.

Rustin was a lifelong activist.
He organized the efforts
for the Montgomery Bus Boycott
using his knowledge from a previous

successful bus boycott
ten years before Montgomery.
He was the chief organizer
of the 1965 March on Washington.

The strategies he learned in India
were influential for MLK Jr.
on how to peacefully protest
and Rustin worked with DC police
on non-violent strategies
to make the march a success.
He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom,
posthumously in 2013.

Rustin was quoted as having said,
“We need, in every community,
a group of angelic troublemakers.”¹

Rustin’s nickname could have been Andrew.

Just about every day, rain or shine,
Ms. Carolyn stands
on one corner in the morning
and the opposite corner in the afternoon.
She is watching,
always watching for this child or that one,
shaking her head and calling out to the boys
that would run through the cross walk
on a green light
just to tempt fate.
Ms. Carolyn walks into the street
with her stop sign,
sometimes holding her ground
when the lights have changed
so that a 2nd grader
who is in a full sprint around the corner
will safely get across the street
and into Oakwood before the bell.
Ms. Carolyn learns every child’s name
and then every parents’ name.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjCUnXTaCgU>

Ms. Carolyn could be nicknamed, Andrew.

Dr. Diana Greene,
superintendent of Duval Country Schools in Florida
was Mr. Bell's substitute teacher
for his 3rd grade class last week.
The teachers were wanting to attend
a rally for school funds—
but quite quickly the substitutes
were used up.

Superintendent Greene filled in
so that Mr. Bell could attend that rally.
Dr. Green said wants her teachers to know
she supports them and remembers what is like
to be a teacher in the classroom.

Dr. Diana Greene nickname could have been Andrew.²

And you know who else is an Andrew
—you are.
Every time you make the commitment
to work behind the scenes
for God's kingdom.
Every time you work on
bringing someone to Jesus—
even though I know I sound
more Baptist and Pentecostal right now.

When you sling pots
in the kitchen after Wednesday night supper.
When you sign up
to be an advisor
and give up your Friday night
to go on the overnight retreat
with the Middle School youth.
When you agree to be
on a Sabbath Soup team;

² <https://www.wfla.com/news/education/florida-superintendent-subs-for-3rd-grade-class-so-teacher-can-attend-rally/?fbclid=IwAR2g8ignAW2AqJLhikhukd9IZI66xYUy9TkpKyBqSG2qGQWOLoXF2rY06iE>

knit a prayer shawl;
write a card to church member;
welcome someone new
who sits in your pew;
invites your neighbor to Sunday School...
we could nickname you Andrew.

Andrew brought people to Christ,
but not by being the one
who we might remember right away.
Andrew spread the gospel
and was just fine with a mention
here and there.
He may not have a square in Rome,
but there's a St. Andrew's Lutheran
just around the corner.
Andrew worked and didn't get much PR.

But I am willing to bet,
for every Peter, James and John
that we remember from church history,
there were probably 10,000 Andrews.³

Just this week a woman and her husband
who live in my neighborhood,
were looking for a church
and posted a question that essentially
asked her Facebook community,
'where in Hickory would they feel welcomed
and like they belonged?'

Two of our congregation members,
one young man who grew up in this church
but now lives out of town
and a one of our current college students,
all piped up with name,
First Presbyterian.

³ Edward F. Markquat, http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_andrew.htm

We need Andrew's.

The church needs them
and you and I need them.

Brothers and sisters
who hear that message
of the one who comes into our lives,
to take away the sins of the world:
we need those brothers and sisters who say,
we have found the Messiah.

Maybe you have a nickname
or maybe you've always wanted one.

The good news is,
nicknames seem to be biblical.