

EVANGELISM MADE EASY

11/15/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Feast of St. Andrew: Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Psalm 19:1-6; ~~Romans 10:8b-18~~; Matthew 4:18-22

Today, with the streamers and [at the Drive-In service] bagpipers, we're celebrating our patron saint, Andrew. Do you know how many times Andrew is actually mentioned in the Bible? Exactly twice. We hear about him in the passage that was just read, and later, Andrew is asked to engage the boy whose loaves and fishes feed thousands.

And that's it! Other disciples, like Peter, James and John are mentioned throughout the Gospels; Thomas and Mary get extra airtime; even Judas, who betrays Jesus, is mentioned more. But Andrew is mostly known as the brother of Simon Peter.

And, yet, today's passage is the very reason so many churches claim Andrew as their patron saint. Although, in this version—found in both Matthew and Mark—Andrew and his brother Simon Peter are called by Jesus together, in John's version, Andrew is called first, and then he immediately goes to bring his brother Simon Peter into the fold, and they quickly share the Good News of God's promise with John and James. So, Andrew is given the honor of being the first evangelizer.

Over the years, as we talk about evangelism, I think we've better defined what we mean by that. Unlike the old idea that evangelism is a high-pressured way of sort of hoodwinking people into Christianity, most of us have come to understand that evangelism is a way of inviting others into experiencing God's love. But still, that's a little elusive, isn't it?

Your parish delegates and I spent last Friday night and most of Saturday in Zoom meetings for our annual Diocesan Convention. Our opening speaker was Stephanie Spellers, who is the Presiding Bishop's canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Stewardship of Creation. Some of you may be familiar with her book *Radical Welcome*.

What I love about Canon Spellers is she is very down to earth, and joyfully lives out her faith. She gives concrete examples of how she does that, and she breaks down her message into consumable nuggets. For example, her definition for evangelism is: "Seeking, naming and celebrating Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people."

I'll repeat that: "Seeking, naming and celebrating Jesus' loving presence in the stories of all people." In other words, evangelism is as simple as noticing where Christ is at work in your life—or in the lives of others—and then telling someone about it. Furthermore, Canon Spellers explained evangelism is explicitly naming our good works as Christ-centered.

What she means by that is that when we read about how the disciple Andrew and a young boy helped convert five loaves and five fish to feed thousands, we don't say, "oh, those we're such nice people, full of generosity and kindness." Rather, we claim this miracle to be the work of God. It's in the Bible, so of course it's a story about God. But Canon Spellers' point is that just because our current stories aren't in the Bible, doesn't mean they aren't stories about God.

We discussed this idea throughout our strategic planning process and, I know the Faith in Action committee has wrestled with this. Of course, our plans involve continuing to help out our neighbors, because it's the right thing to do. But the very foundation from which we offer showers, meals and food to the community is Christ's call to care for those in need. When we claim that as our primary motivator, we are evangelists.

St. Andrew's is not a social service agency; we are a Christ-centered faith community. When we share our stories with people about what happens on our campus—in terms of how we see God at work in the world—then we are evangelizing. We are “seeking, naming and celebrating Jesus’ loving presence in the stories of all people.”

So, Jesus says to Andrew and Simon Peter: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people,” but he wasn’t inviting them into a contest to see how many fish they could catch. Fishing for people is not about filling our pews (or our parking lot), it’s about bringing the Good News to others, and welcoming them into God’s loving family. And this doesn’t mean we’re only telling the stories of what worked out the way we had hoped, but also sharing the ways in which we were transformed by God—even in the midst of tragedy.

Last week was the four-year anniversary of the second fire on our campus, so I’ve been thinking about the young man responsible for that arson. It never occurred to me that I might sense the work of the Holy Spirit in a court room, but three years ago, when I went to Tyler’s sentencing, I felt enveloped by the presence of Christ in the proceedings.

I could see Christ at work in the way the judge offered words of wisdom to Tyler; I watched the Holy Spirit softening Tyler’s face as he listened to Pastor Laura and me read our statements of forgiveness and reconciliation; and I felt God’s love in the hugs of his family as they expressed their gratitude for us being there.

You have stories like that, too. But you—like me—might forget to add, “I see God at work” in this or that, as you share the story. Maybe together we can develop a new habit, so that we, too can be fishers of people, bringing God’s Good News of justice, peace, hope, and love to everyone we encounter.

-AMEN

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your Holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Moses said to the people of Israel, “Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”

Psalm 19:1-6

1 The heavens declare the glory of God, *
and the firmament shows his handiwork.

- 2 One day tells its tale to another, *
and one night imparts knowledge to another.
- 3 Although they have no words or language, *
and their voices are not heard,
- 4 Their sound has gone out into all lands, *
and their message to the ends of the world.
- 5 In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; *
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.
- 6 It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens
and runs about to the end of it again; *
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.
- 7 [The law of the LORD is perfect
and revives the soul; *
the testimony of the LORD is sure
and gives wisdom to the innocent.
- 8 The statutes of the LORD are just
and rejoice the heart; *
the commandment of the LORD is clear
and gives light to the eyes.
- 9 The fear of the LORD is clean
and endures for ever; *
the judgments of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold,
more than much fine gold, *
sweeter far than honey,
than honey in the comb.
- 11 By them also is your servant enlightened, *
and in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 Who can tell how often he offends? *
cleanse me from my secret faults.
- 13 Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion over me; *
then shall I be whole and sound,
and innocent of a great offense.
- 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
heart be acceptable in your sight, *
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.]

Romans 10:8b-18

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No

one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

Matthew 4:18-22

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.