

Proper 12 B
John 6: 1-21
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July 29, 2012

Blessed be the name of God!

Andrew, one of the disciples, said to Jesus,
“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.”

Today’s gospel is a very familiar one—the one about the feeding of the many. We know the cast of characters: Jesus, the apostles, the young boy with five barley loaves and the two fish, and the ever-present crowd. When I read it I thought, “Oh I wonder how I can make this gospel new again??? Or as one of my former seminary professors, Hal Perry, once said, “How will I carve up this old turkey in a new way? So here I go . . .

Due to my very fine detail on the parish directory, I know I share a very important date with at least two others in our church. It is my birthday on the feast of St. Andrew, the apostle—November 30th. I am sure that Shirley Viall and Bruce Campbell also have a fondness for this same Andrew as they have celebrated their special day just as I have.

On St. Andrew’s Day, we pray

“Give us grace to follow Jesus without delay:
and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence.”

When we examine the great leaders of the church, there are certain names that just seem to surface—names like Peter, James, John, Paul, Mary Magdalene, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley. Many of us know of more contemporaries: Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, John XXIII, and Oscar Romaro. These were men and women who made a big difference—who stood out in a

crowd—sometimes quietly, sometimes not so quietly—yet they have left a significant mark on thousands, if not millions of people.

At the same time and often along side, there are a great number of leaders of the church who have labored far more quietly. There are even some who ministered in relative obscurity. And they did as much for the church in their quiet, unassuming ways, as did those who labored more conspicuously. Today we find Andrew—one of these great unassuming leaders—Andrew, often introduced as the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew is quietly named in our gospel and I bet that many of us would have missed if I were not making such a big deal of his presence!

Admittedly, Andrew is the least known of the first four in the inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—and he was most certainly a member of the group that seems to have been closest to Jesus. Yet Andrew is markedly different from the other three. There are times when Andrew seems missing from the “key events” at which we would expect him to be present, and then, at other times, we find him “the featured player” of the inner circle, always finding ways to widen the circle of Jesus’ friends.

What do we find when we look at the life of Andrew? Two things. First we find the man whom Jesus first called to be a disciple. And secondly, we find the quiet one who, through his own eagerness to follow Jesus, eagerly brought other individuals to Jesus. In fact, the first person Andrew brought to Jesus was none other than his own brother Simon.

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Andrew and Simon were brothers, we know that much. But Gospel evidence also seems to indicate they were life-long companions, and possibly business partners with another set of fishermen—James and John. The four of them also seemed to have shared common spiritual interests, in that they all became disciples of Jesus' cousin—John the Baptist. After meeting Jesus, the four went back to fishing for a while before being called into fulltime work as disciples of Jesus. So, it was only natural that the four—Andrew, Simon, James and John—formed a cohesive inner group within the body of the twelve apostles.

Within the four friends following Jesus, Andrew was most certainly the least conspicuous. In fact scripture does not tell us a whole lot about him. Basically Andrew lived his life in the shadow of his brother, Simon, later called Simon Peter. Andrew was more often than not introduced as Peter's brother, as if it were that fact alone that made him significant! It was almost as if he was anonymous except through his kinship with Peter!

In taking a closer look at Andrew, his ministry was all about quality, and not quantity. The very first thing he did after he met Jesus? Andrew goes to get his brother and brings him to meet Jesus—with no hesitation. Andrew must have known, based upon Simon's personality, that as soon as Simon committed to Jesus, that he—Andrew—was going to be relegated to a more secondary status, which seems to have been reported time and again! Yet, Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus anyway, because Jesus was so important and Andrew knew that he and Simon would be in this partnership together, a lifelong one__ just like always.

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Andrew most often appears to be the most thoughtful one of the inner circle of disciples. Simon Peter became characterized as impetuous and willing to say just about anything or rush headlong into almost anywhere, full speed ahead! James and John were recognized as reckless and nicknamed “the Sons of Thunder”—and for good reason! Our friend Andrew could be rash when in the company of the others, but he most often did just the right thing—when he acted independently of the other three. He was an effective leader who chose not to take the spotlight.

Let’s take a look at today’s gospel of John.

When 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?” Jesus said this to test Philip, for Jesus himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered Jesus; “Six months’ wages could not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” One of the disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”

First we see Philip, paying close attention to detail and finances, announcing that they do not have enough money to provide for the crowd. Philip’s vision is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the many people. It is at this point that Andrew, quietly steps forward, and brings the little child with the loaves and the fishes to Jesus. Of course Andrew does not know HOW Jesus is going to pull this off, Andrew just seems to have faith that Jesus CAN pull it off. And of course we all know the rest of the story of the feeding of the five thousand plus the women and children!

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This story is very typical of Andrew and his approach to ministry. He just goes along quietly bringing folks to Jesus, introducing them at just the right time so that they too can have lifelong relationships with Jesus. Andrew lets others worry about the multitudes. Andrew concentrates on the individuals. He is more concerned with bringing people to Jesus than he is with getting credit or being the one in charge. Andrew seems to have very little craving for honor or recognition. He simply moves along, only speaking when he has to, and then only when it is related to bringing someone to Jesus. He was never the foundation or even the pillar of the church—that was his infamous brother! We well might see Andrew as the keystone, the grout or mortar that held everything in place. He was one of those rare and treasured individuals who take a back seat in order to support others in their work, and he did not mind this calling as long as the work of Jesus was getting done.

Andrew sets the fine example for many of us who wonder what we can do of value in the church. Did Andrew wonder or worry? Was he slighted in any way? No. He was privileged. He was the first to hear from John the Baptist that Jesus was the lamb of God! He was the first to follow Jesus. He was part of the inner circle. And best of all, he had a whole lifetime of doing what he loved best—introducing individuals to his friend Jesus!

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I bet we all have met “Andrews” in our own lives—maybe a choir director, a neighbor, a tiny little child, someone we shared a sandwich with, someone whom we recognized later in life who had an unexpected and remarkable influence on our lives. Perhaps that “Andrew” was just THERE for us, at the right place at the right time, and

pointed us in the next direction or turned us around without very many words. Perhaps that Andrew reached out a hand when we needed the warmth of a human touch the most—brought us into a life giving circle of care—taught us a skill or a trade or a craft—helped us to voice our first prayers!

“Andrews” are all around. “Andrews” have an ongoing ministry of welcome, a ministry of hellos and goodbyes, a ministry of glue and the cement that continually centers us and moves us into the community quietly and with a very special place. “Andrews” are all around us. We see “Andrews” in the “prayer hands” of children, the tears of adults, and the thanksgivings we recognize in our lives and voice from our hearts. Yes we see “Andrews” all around, quietly going about the ministry of bringing individuals to Jesus at just the right time.

Our gospel this morning is another example of an “Andrew” moment, another touchstone of a new way of life. What happens on the hillside is an indication of how God wants the world to operate. Jesus welcomes the little child that Andrew brings forward. Jesus takes these simple gifts, gives thanks for them, and shares them with all those who are hungry. Somehow it is enough, enough for everybody, ENOUGH, and actually more than is needed!

Call it an “Andrew” moment . . . Call it the best picnic ever . . . call it the first Eucharist! When we give away what we have, when we give ourselves away, then God blesses our gifts and multiplies them, and there is enough for everyone and even more. Such simple “Andrew gifts”, given freely, will feed people, restore relationships, and contribute to the well being of all God’s people. Not a bad life long work!

So, look around. “Andrews” are here! Andrew is quietly going about his ministry of bringing individuals to Jesus at just the right time. We are all invited! All are welcome! There will be more than enough Jesus for everybody this morning! There will be plenty of bread, and plenty of wine. No one will go away hungry!

But I will warn you. Andrew is here quietly inviting each of us to God’s new way of life. If you bring your selves and your simple gifts to share, be careful! I have already told you that this new way of life is how God wants the world to operate! So sing the songs and pray the prayers to get ready! Our world needs a hunk of bread, and some fish to share. Our world needs our steady beam of love and our visible blessing wherever we go! Our world needs a quiet and compassionate introduction to Jesus! Trust me, now is just the right time!

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