

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Sunday November 24, 2019 - Feast of St. Andrew's (transferred)  
Text: Matthew 4 18-22  
Preacher Christopher McLaren  
Theme: Fascinated by Christ

It's a simple story really, Jesus walking along the sea of Galilee, the wind in his hair the smell of the moist sea air and boats bobbing along the shoreline. He sees them, these two brothers working at their craft, casting their nets into the shallows of the sea, hoping for a catch. His approach is direct and simple, follow me and I'll take what you do and transform it into something far more challenging and rewarding. Jesus makes a claim on these young men. He claims them for his own, for his emerging mission in the world and suddenly, surprisingly, almost without explanation they follow him.

I've often been a little puzzled by this story. Why did they follow Jesus so readily? John's gospel records that Andrew first met Jesus at a tender and sensitive time in his life. Andrew along with his friends were looking for a focus in their life and they were quite sure that they had found that in the preaching and teaching of John the Baptist. John's electrifying energy, surprising honesty and passion resonated with Andrew. However, it ended in disappointment as John's movement was cut short by his death at the hands of king Herod.

One day when Andrew and a friend were talking to John, Jesus happened to be nearby. They followed after him, wanting to understand who he was, their sense of searching and longing clearly on display. Jesus had only to turn toward them and ask a simple question to reel them into his circle of influence, "What are you looking for? Stunned they stammered, "Where do you live?" It was obvious that they wanted to spend some time with Jesus and his hospitality was warm and welcoming. "Come and see," said Jesus.

Just after this encounter we discover the Andrew was deeply attracted to Jesus. He was eager to follow in whatever direction Jesus pointed. The gospel tells us that Andrew excitedly told his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah!"

Later, there is one more small detail about the life of Andrew. Although it is overshadowed by the miracle at the center of the story, it was Andrew who found a small boy among thousands of people and brought the boy with his loaves and fishes to Jesus. Andrew has a knack for bring people to Jesus, to helping find an opening in their soul. Andrew seems always to be bringing friends, relatives, and

strangers to Jesus. It's a gift he has, making introductions, sharing his friends with friends.

It turned out that Andrew was good at exactly what Jesus told him he would learn to do, fish for people. But, the prerequisite for fishing for people is that first you must be caught by Jesus. Jesus invites these brothers into his life and into formation as disciples. They will learn what Jesus has to teach them, they will enter his consciousness and learn the change of mind and heart that being a spiritual leader, a disciple requires.

There are of course conditions to following Jesus. They must leave their old work behind – they must drop their nets. They will need to focus on new relationships and this entailed walking away from family as the only center, their father, and entering a whole new set of relationships beyond their family. ***If you want to follow Jesus then there is a change of life, a “repentance” that is required – a turning away from present preoccupations to entertain more adventuresome possibilities.*** (Shea) Following Jesus is not business as usual it is constantly pulling you into a deeper level of consciousness and asking you to change.

I suppose that all of this talk of fishing for people and changing your consciousness is a little scary. I'm a fisherman and I know how fishing works; you lure unsuspecting finny creatures into a situation in which they are caught against their will and pulled violently from the water. People are quite different than this. People are not supposed to be coerced into doing things, though our lives are filled with coercive advertising every day. People are influenced, wooed and drawn to new things through the desires of their hearts. If you want to influence people toward following a new way or the person of Jesus, you must appeal to them on a heart level.

I suppose that this is what happened to Andrew and his brother and the other two brothers in this story as well. Jesus reaches them at the heart level, the deep desire of their inner life is uncovered and they choose to follow it. There will be a great deal more conversation, experience and teaching before they will be “all in,” but from the start Jesus is speaking to their hearts in a way that is moving and attractive.

I love this aspect of the story: I think that the gospel is good news and it means that it is deeply attractive and that one is invited into that faith not scared into faith by some sort of fearful conversion to avoid punishment. **I believe that we need our hopes affirmed not our fears.** We are naturally fearful creatures and it is the

gospel that redirects us into the posture of faith, of trusting in God's goodness in our lives, of risking our own loving energies toward others.

I wonder have you ever been deeply attracted to someone other than a spouse or a partner, not in a sexual way but in a deeply interested way. Have you ever been granted a view into another person's life that fascinated you and drew you to them like a magnet?

In preparing for this sermon I read this moving description of the life-changing experiences of fascination and deep attraction.

I have seen a mother lean down to correct a child and say words so perfect, say sentences of such loving discipline, that, if the truth of what is happening be known, God must be praised. I have seen a man face death in such a way that it had no sting, and my fascination made me mute. I have listened to a woman forgive a system that had badly violated her and forgive the men and women in that system who were unwitting accomplices. She forgave them not because she was too weak to retaliate but because forgiveness was the only way life could be served, both in her and in those who had hurt her. (Shea).

Life is full of fascinating people and their responses to the pain and indifference of the world around them. As John Shea writes,

*"Every day people are leaning into life and either coaxing or muscling it toward redemption. In creative ways that are difficult to predict, they are making things better. If we catch them at it and find ourselves attracted, we may want to know more.*

*We follow fascination, especially fascination that has our name on it. When we see someone thinking, feeling, or acting in a way that, at the present moment, we are not capable of, that way of thinking, feeling or acting has our "name" on it. We see it as a liberating next step for ourselves and we apprentice ourselves to it. It draws us into discipleship. A disciple is merely a fascinated person who desires to know and do what they seen in another."* (Shea)

We are deeply relational beings. We live by our social interactions and connections. If we are truthful, we are always noticing others, the way they think, act, process difficult circumstances, how they respond to adversity. Often others make little impact upon us. Toward some we may be envious. But toward others we may gravitate and learn, we may work at spending time with them so that we can learn

their moves, understand the way they think and emulate them in a sort of unspoken apprenticeship.

I wonder if we might take a moment right here in this place of worship, in the midst of this sermon to consider something important. If we think over our lives, we will discover that we have a history of discipleship, of following people whom we respect, of apprenticing ourselves to those whose approach to life and struggle we wish to emulate. We have watched our parents, teachers, coaches, friends, professors, co-workers, supervisors, spouses, siblings and parishioners. We may not have left our nets to follow these examples but we have placed our attention and energy into understanding something about the people we admire and look up to in order to learn their moves and try to incorporate them into our own lives.

The gospels present Christ as a fascinating person. He is exceedingly unusual. He is not afraid of the people he is supposed to be afraid of. He doesn't shy away from confrontation nor from telling the truth. He is not bound by the petty rules of the religious folks and he is not constrained by the societal norms that almost everyone lives by. In short, Jesus is unconcerned about his reputation and that makes him fascinating. Jesus does not let the cruelty and danger of King Herod dissuade him from teaching throughout the countryside. Jesus, uncharacteristically does not wait for people to come to him and ask to be his disciples. Instead, he assertively chooses them, thereby controverting an age-old tradition and surprisingly honoring those who choose to accept his invitation.

Jesus has the energy of life about him. His compassion is infectious and his capacity for loving is overwhelming. He is in short fascinating and he makes people want to get close to him, want to be near him, want to be like him, want to learn his moves and discover the source of his purity of heart. Those who encounter him sense the Spirit at work within him and believe that it will take them out of the death-dealing ways they have succumbed to and into a new way of life that keeps welling up to more life.

This is what the Apostle Andrew experienced. He was fascinated by Christ. He was drawn to him, to the new way of life that seemed to shine forth from his very person. He wanted to know Christ, to share in his life. Andrew is our guide in this matter of discipleship. Our task as Christians, our charge as the people of God in this place is to strive to know Christ. But I don't want that to sound like a chore. The Christian life is really about becoming curious about the person of Christ. In fact, that is what the church should be a place of deep curiosity and fascination about the wild ways and life of Christ.

At a clergy continuing education offering several years ago, the presenter showed a brief film of an interview with theologian Lyn Sweet about the spiritual life and people's understanding of church. The theologian said that most people who reject the church and any real engagement with the spiritual life say they have experienced the church to be these three things: hypocritical, judgmental and boring. I'm afraid that too often our critics are correct. Sweet went on to say that the church is meant to be the most creative place on earth because we claim to know the creator of all things personally. This, one would hope, might lead us to emulate God's own self to become a place of deep creativity and fascination. Sweet would rather people discover and experience the church as a place where "anything can happen and probably will." That is the kind of church people would find fascinating and engaging.

On this Feast of St. Andrew, I invite you to "readily follow" the person of Jesus, on an adventure into life, life that is fascinating and full of creativity and surprises. We are invited to follow the wildest being in the universe and I'm hoping that in doing so you will discover the source of your own deep curiosity and fascination, that you might have life and have it more abundantly in the person of Jesus. **A disciple is merely a fascinated person who desires to know and do what they seen in another.**

As you make your forward to the Eucharistic table, allow yourself to be more and more attracted and curious about the person of Jesus, that you may become a more and more a disciple of this beautiful man. Allow your desire to grow as this poem of Mary Oliver describes:

*The Vast Ocean Begins Just Outside Our Church: The Eucharist*

*Something has happened  
to the bread  
and the wine.*

*They have been blessed.  
What now?  
The body leans forward*

*to receive the gift  
from the priest's hand,  
then the chalice.*

*They are something else now*

*from what they were  
before this began.*

*I want  
to see Jesus,  
maybe in the clouds*

*or on the shore,  
just walking,  
beautiful man*

*and clearly  
someone else  
besides.*

*On the hard days  
I ask myself  
if I ever will.*

*Also there are times  
my body whispers to me  
that I have.*

*-Mary Oliver*

*Note: I am indebted to theologian and spirituality teacher John Shea for his discussion on following fascination. His commentary on this text was invaluable in the shaping of this sermon. I am also grateful for the writing of Herbert O'Driscoll on the life of Andrew in his book For All the Saints. May we readily follow the call of Christ on our lives, not out of duty but rather out of fascination with the overwhelming love of God.*

### **The Kirkin' o' the Tartan**

*(Tartan bearers and wearers will please stand)*

*Almighty God, we, a congregation of your people, offer hearty thanks for our Scottish heritage, and all the traditions of auld Scotia that we enjoy. Among these Scottish traits of character are honesty toward all, a love of our kith and kin, a talent for forbearance, and a special brand of rugged individualism. You made us lovers of poetry, song, and the dance. You imbued us with a love of scripture, Your own holy word. You made us a people who sought literacy and knowledge regardless of our financial or social station.*

*We remember and continue to remember all who lived and died bearing tartans such as these before us this morning. They left to us a tangible and tactile Scottish heritage. We also remember in thanks the members of the Scottish Episcopal Church and their*

*forebears who bequeathed to us the Apostolic succession through Samuel Seabury, the first Bishop of the Episcopal Church in America.*

*Now, we ask your blessing upon these Tartans and help us to remember that in your service is the perfect freedom that we all seek. Grant, O God, that we too may ever be true to the Faith of Our Fathers which has played an inestimable part in the building of this beloved land, in the Name of the Prince of Peace, even Jesus Christ our Lord.*