

## **“Who Was your Andrew or Philip?”**

Date: March 29, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: John 1:43-51

Theme: Witnessing

Occasion: Palm Sunday, series on discipleship

Today we conclude our series on discipleship by looking at the spiritual discipline of witnessing. So far we've looked at prayers, presence, gifts and service. Today we look at our witness.

You know, when something good happens to you, you want to tell someone else about it. Recently one of our church members saw a movie and said, “Pastor, you need to see this movie. I went to see ‘Do You Believe,’ and it was fantastic. You need to go see it.”

Another parishioner handed me a book after church, one Sunday, and said, “I’d like for you to read this. It really inspired me. I think you’ll like it.” It was the book entitled *Unbroken*, based on the true story of an American pilot shot down during World War II and how he survived a Japanese prisoner of war camp. The book was later made into an inspiring moving.

Somebody else saw me using my flip-phone and commented on it. He said, “You know, the new smart phones have so many new features, if you give it a try, I think you’ll really like it.”

Each one of these persons was giving me their witness. They were telling me about a book, or a movie or a phone that has made a difference in their lives. And they’d like me to give it a look, consider it. They weren’t trying to sell me on it; they were simply sharing something important in their life that they thought would make a difference in mine.

In the opening scenes of the Gospel according to John, we meet two disciples of John the Baptist. The fact they had been following this eccentric prophet out into the wilderness tells us something about the discontent in their own lives. They had a spiritual hunger for a deeper relationship with God, and John was “scratching their itch.”

Jesus is on a journey and he bumps into one of those men, named Philip. He offers Philip a simple invitation, “Come and see.” He follows. Then, Philip finds another man, Nathanael by name, and invites him to come and see Jesus, too.

Prior to this happening, Jesus calls Andrew to come and see. Andrew is excited, and he goes to his brother Simon and says, “We have found the Messiah, come and see!” And Simon became a follower as well. We know him as the apostle Peter.

Were it not for Andrew and Philip being willing to share their stories, Peter and Nathanael would never have met Jesus and had their lives transformed. After experiencing for themselves this abundant life that Jesus offered, they shared their stories with someone else.

But, take notice of who they told. They began with people they knew, people who knew them. Now that’s witnessing at its best. It’s one person sharing with another person how he or she has experienced God’s love in Christ, and simply offering the invitation, “Come and see.”

Who has been like Andrew and Philip in your life? Who are the people who have shared their faith with you? Was it a Sunday School teacher, a speaker on a Koinonia weekend, or a friend at work? Was

it your mom or dad, or your Grand-mom? Who first introduced you to Jesus? Maybe it was your girlfriend, who you now call your wife? Who was your Andrew or Philip? We all had someone who said, “Come and see.”

Evangelism is a good word with a bad reputation. The term has been abused by slick preachers and manipulative politicians. It’s been so abused that people inside the church are afraid to speak it and people outside the church run for cover when they hear it.

But the word evangelism comes from the root word meaning, “good news.” When we have good news, whether it’s about a book, a movie, a phone, or our faith, we want to share it. We want to invite someone else to experience what we’ve experienced.

If we go back to the two examples from Scripture this morning, Andrew inviting Simon, and Philip inviting Nathanael, we notice a couple of things that are very different from the bad kind of evangelizing we’ve come to know and dread.

In both cases there was no pressure or manipulation, just the simple invitation to “come and see” the one who became the answer to the searching that was already going on in their lives.

My friends, there are a significant number of unchurched, uncommitted people in our world who long to experience the love of God through a grace-centered tradition. They don’t need to be judged or condemned; they need to be invited to experience God’s amazing love and grace.

I believe our United Methodist, our Wesleyan spiritual tradition, offers people of today a grace-filled message of hope and life. They are simply waiting for some faithful Methodist disciple to say, “Come

and see.” James Harnish offers us several suggestions on how to share our faith, how to witness to the love of Jesus Christ in what he calls *invitational evangelism*. Briefly, here are his suggestions:

1. **Begin with friendship.** No one wants to be manipulated. You don't have to argue with people, just start with a friendship. If you don't have many friends who aren't already Christians, then widen your circle of friends.
2. **Listen.** Listen to what's going on in their lives before you start telling them about your story. Begin where they are. Listen to their questions, their fears, their hurts, their anger. Listen!
3. **Know your story.** Can you tell the story of your relationship with Christ in a simple, clear and concise way? We're going to learn how to do that this week in our study book and then talk about it next Tuesday in our study group. Know your own story.
4. **Offer the invitation.** The invitation to “come and see” will vary from situation to situation. It may be a direct invitation to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. It may be an invitation to visit our church, to join a small group that you're a part of, or to join with you on a short-term mission project. It's always an open-ended invitation that begins a journey toward a Christ-centered life.
5. **Trust the Holy Spirit.** God may have prepared that person to receive your witness and make a decision. Or, God may be using you to plant some seeds of faith. Do your part, and trust the Spirit to do the rest. Because my friends, we do not save souls. That's God's work. We are simply witnesses.

When Jesus said, “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8) he wasn't speaking only to the first apostles. He was speaking to you

and to me. In this coming Holy Week, we are offering several different worship opportunities. These are golden opportunities for you to witness to family and friends.

“We’re having a special service on Thursday,” you could say. Would you like to come with me and see what it’s like? It’s a remembrance of Jesus’ Last Supper. I’ve been there before and it always touches my heart. I think you might get a lot out of it. I could pick you up.”

Or you could invite them to the Good Friday service, or the sunrise service, or Easter service next Sunday. You could tell them “these are the holiest services of the year, for us Christians. They are at the core of our faith. I’d love for you to come and see, give it a try.”

What if people were as comfortable or as energetic sharing their relationship with Christ, as they are about telling others about their iPhones? Who knows, it might transform the world. May it be so. Amen.

*A Disciple’s Path*, James Harnish. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012, pp. 65-74.