

A Sermon for St. Andrew's the Apostle

November 24, 2013 – Matthew 4:18-22

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Well, here we are. St. Andrew's yearly celebration. The holy party we have once a year for a man about whom we know so little. The feast day of a martyr who, truth be told, we probably don't think much about for the 364 days in between. And is it any wonder? I mean, that Gospel passage Gloria just read was a real page-turner, wasn't it? Jesus walks beside the Sea of Galilee. He sees Simon and Andrew casting their net. He calls them and tells them he will make them fishers of men, and they follow...and then Jesus calls two more...

I say this with absolutely no disrespect for the Gospel, but perhaps with just a bit of pique with the liturgical scholars who decided these five sentences would be the appointed reading for the celebration of St. Andrew. It should come as no surprise that every preacher – well, at least this preacher – secretly longs for a Gospel reading that is rich and deep and pregnant with possibility.

It should also come as no surprise that the Holy Spirit will move, once one stops being snarky, and open up even what seems to be the leanest of passages.

We know, from celebrations of yore, that Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. We know he was a fisherman. We know he is always mentioned in the lists of apostles; that he was present at the appearance of Jesus to the disciples after the crucifixion; and, that Andrew, himself, was crucified on a saltire (or x-shaped) cross, for spreading the Good News of Christ. Historians tell us the emperor Constantine had Andrew's bones moved to Scotland, and that Andrew became the patron saint of that country. While he is not our patron saint, he holds some significance for us, because the first bishops of the new Episcopal Church in the new United States of America were consecrated by bishops of the Church of Scotland...to get around that whole 'pledging allegiance to the king' business. And while scholars continue to "search for the historical Jesus," that about covers the search for the historical Andrew.

All I can think of is why? Not why do we celebrate a martyred disciple of Jesus, but why fishermen? Why these particular fishermen? Why that place? Why? Why Andrew? Why did Andrew **follow** Jesus?

Why do we?

A few of us spent Friday and Saturday at the annual convention of our diocese. I am sorry you could not all be there – to be immersed in the joyful celebration of all that the diocese is doing – all that we are, as members of this church and this diocese in this place. I wish each and every one of you could have shared in the bread and the wine, at Eucharist with hundreds and hundreds of brothers and

sisters committed to sharing God's love. I wish you could have heard Bishop Lee preach the Gospel message as he does with such passion, humility, and grace, just as I wish you could have heard him share his enthusiasm – and his challenge – regarding the work the diocese has been called to do. “Making all things new,” was the theme – the essence – the intention of convention this year. Words spoken at the crescendo of the most beautiful passage found in chapter 21 of the Revelation to John. The passage that says this: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”

Did Andrew – stooped over his net on the shores of Galilee – know? When Jesus stopped and called to him, did he know this was the One who would make all things new?

Do we?

I wonder why *we* follow Christ – why we call ourselves followers of Jesus. I'd ask you each to think about that. Not ‘why are you Christian,’ and not Muslim or Jew or agnostic or atheist. Not ‘why you come to church on Sunday morning.’ Why *do* you follow Jesus? Is it, by any chance, because you...and I...and possibly Andrew...hear the call to be part of making all things new?

Aren't things fine enough just the way they are?

Making things new means making things change – changing ourselves – and making things change sounds like work, maybe even unpleasant work. Bishop Lee told us at convention that the only unchangeable fact in this world is that things change. “If you think you can *keep* things from changing,” he said, “just look in the mirror!”

Changing things in the hope of making something new goes against that part of us that would just like to sit back and enjoy things the way things are. Most of us here, in this congregation, have reached the time and place in our lives that we worked decades to achieve – a time and place that held the promise of relaxation, sheer enjoyment, setting our own schedules and setting our own agendas. This is supposed to be the time for shedding the stresses of careers, raising families, and earning enough money to live into retirement – the time of much-deserved rest. Why would we want to change? Why would we want to be part of making everything new? Sounds like a heckuva lot of work!

The irony here is that the one who gave us life – the God who breathed us into being – also gave us the gift of choosing how we live our lives. God does not hover over us, reminding us that if we don't clean our room, we won't get our holy allowance. God invites us into God's work, but it's voluntary enlistment and not conscription. We are invited...not drafted. And the hard thing to wrap our mind around – our culturally molded, earthbound sensibilities around – is the whole idea that if we choose not to participate, God loves us just the same. If we say, "I worked hard all my life, and I am comfortable as I am, and I think I'll just opt out of this change business and leave it to someone else...oh, and thanks God for your part in my success,"well, if that is what we say, there is no smiting or wrath that God sends on our heads. Just love.

But you see, God also created in us – and reminds us through Jesus, the Incarnate One – the very real understanding that when any man, woman, or child is suffering, every heart aches. When someone is hungry, every heart feels the emptiness. When someone is belittled, bullied, oppressed, or overlooked, every heart is burdened with sadness. In our creation – and through our baptism – God has invited and empowered us to be part of the change – part of the solution – part of the healing for all that heartache and hunger and sadness. Part of the creation of the time when "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." Making all things new.

At convention all of us – (all of us) – were called – *challenged* – to look again at the legacy of slavery. To move outside our comfort zone in order to look anew at how one group of people marginalizes another – how one group or one nation become overlords of another – how churches and congregations can insulate and isolate themselves from all those who might be called 'other.' To change ourselves, that we might become part of the change for others. To make all things new.

We were called – and *challenged* – to deepen our relationships with our brothers and sisters in South Sudan and Southeast Mexico, and to do so in a spirit of mutual love and respect, expecting not only that our generosity might change their circumstances for the better, but that their generosity might change us as well. To make all things new.

We were called – and *challenged* – to the ongoing and intentional pursuit of our own physical and spiritual wellbeing, that our bodies, minds and spirits might change...that we might become new.

Andrew chucked it all in – his livelihood, his security, the comfort and safety of the familiar – to follow the one he had heard John the Baptist call "The Lamb of God." Did he know what he was getting into? Probably not! And isn't that one of the biggest reasons we don't want to change? Because who knows what the "new" looks like? Who knows if it will work? Who knows if it will bring the result we hope it might? Who knows if the "new" will be any better than the "old?" We don't know.

Maybe we cannot know. What we do know, and can trust, and rely upon...that from which we can take strength and courage...that in which we can put our faith...is the knowledge that *we are from God*...and God is *always* with us.

I leave you with just a few of Bishop Lee's words – a part of his message to the convention on Friday. "God," he said, "is *always* doing a new thing, in creation and its ongoing renewal, in the evolution of human culture, in the community of faith, in our own individual lives. God is the prime mover, the creator and sustainer of all that is or ever will be, and God's mission is the repair, the restoration, the renewing of that creation into a right relationship with himself. The new thing is God's project and we who have been redeemed by God's unexpected action in Jesus, we have the staggering invitation to join in God's mission of making all things new. That's what we're for, that's what all of this is all about."