



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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**2nd Sunday After the Epiphany**

**January 19, 2014**

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## **“Spreading the Word Nearby”**

*(John 1:40-42)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus” (John 1:40-42).*

### **Collect of the Day**

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen**

It's an odd little story, isn't it? It's the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus is walking by; John the Baptist is standing there with two of his disciples, two of his own followers, and John says, "Behold" which means "Look" . . . "the Lamb of God." John's two disciples turn and just like that, they start following Jesus. (And that's okay with John. In fact, he seems to want them to do so.) Jesus, realizing he's being followed, turns and asks: "What are you seeking? What are you looking for?" And instead of giving him an answer, like, "We're looking for the meaning of life," they ask him, "Where are you staying, Rabbi?" – which sounds suspiciously like they're angling for an invitation to lunch or something. That's essentially what they get. "Come and see" he says, and they go with him and spend the day with him. Who knows what they talked about, what Jesus told them, but at the end of the day, one of them, Andrew, finds his brother Simon and tells him the most astonishing thing: "We just found the Messiah." And he persuades Simon to come and see, and he does, and Jesus renames him Peter, and the rest is history.

Notice, the life of faith starts not with a creed or a theological argument or a liturgical act but with an invitation to conversation and relationship. Evangelism, the sharing of truth, the sharing of the Good News happens *here* not by preaching or compelling intellectual argument, but with an act of hospitality, "Come and see."

And notice where Andrew takes this news.

Church tradition says Andrew would eventually take the Gospel all the way to those areas north of the Black Sea, some 900 miles to southern Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Southern Russia (where the Winter Olympics are about to begin) and Georgia. In fact, Andrew would become the patron saint of Ukraine and Romania and Russia. But long before he would even think about going to the nations, he goes to his own brother, Simon. That's where his mission field begins, very, very close to home.

And so it is with us. Your mission field begins with those near and dear to you, your children, your friends, your siblings.

That's not always easy, is it, to proclaim the Gospel, for example, to your older brothers who loved to pin you down with a half nelson and inflict a Pink Rosie on your forehead followed by a Wet Willie in your ears. Proclaiming Christ to those near and dear can be just as difficult as proclaiming it to the perfect stranger in a distant land. There's history there. They know everything about you, good, bad and ugly. And yet, that's where the mission field begins: very close to home. And it can accomplish so much. Just look what happened in our text. Andrew proclaims Jesus to Simon. Jesus changes Simon, even his name. He becomes Peter. And Peter ultimately preaches the faith to thousands. In fact, Jesus would call Peter's confession of faith "the rock upon which he would build the church" (Mt. 16:18).

Pastor Jacob Gaugert was the guest preacher here last weekend. Tomorrow, he takes off for Togo, West Africa, for what he expects to be a 10 to 20 year commitment. I asked him about his travel itinerary. Late in the morning tomorrow, he'll make his way to O'Hare airport in Chicago, and fly first to Detroit. A two hour layover there, and then a 7 1/2 hour flight to Paris, where he will have another three hour layover there. Then follows another long flight to Bomako, Mali, arriving there some time on Tuesday. From

there, he'll eventually make his way to Togo. It's quite a trip, entailing the use of planes, trains, automobiles and buses, and in the end, even a motorcycle, because it's the best way to get around on the rugged roads of Togo. Here's the point. You can get to your mission field by walking into your own home, or across the street, or by walking down the hallway of your apartment. There are people living near you who do not know the Lord Jesus any better than those awaiting Pastor Gaugert in Togo.

It's important to support our missionaries abroad, but don't think the simple act of throwing a few easy bucks into the door offering fulfills your missional responsibilities. Far more important, far more valuable, far more coveted by God is your voice, your relationship with the people close to you. You have access to people Pastor Gaugert will never have, access to people I don't have. Indeed, you might be the only person in position to reach out to that nephew who has drifted away from the faith . . . or the co-worker on the other side of the cubicle, or the God-child that you promised to pray for and nurture in the faith.

I know how that goes. Many of you are God-parents to the children of dear friends from years ago. You were newly married. You spent a lot of time together as couples. You became very close. They asked you to be sponsors and you were honored to do so. But that was a long time ago and there's geographical distance now and you hear from these friends maybe once a year when the Christmas card comes. The friendship has changed. But your obligations as the sponsor to their child . . . that hasn't changed! You promised. Track your God-children down, no matter how old they are, and get back to doing what you promised to do, praying for them daily and encouraging them in the faith. Even if your God-child wants nothing to do with the church, it's hard to imagine him being offended if you were to write, "By the way, though you are married now and have your own

children, I still pray for you that the Lord protects your household and richly blesses you. He loves you in Jesus Christ and so do I.” Who can be offended by that? If he is, that’s his problem. Heap those burning coals on his head (Rom. 12:20).

The text says, “[Andrew] first found his own brother Simon” . . . and, quote, “he brought him to Jesus.” Similarly, your mission field starts very close to home. If you have children, it is your highest calling to make sure they receive a Christian education. It is not enough to drop them off at Sunday School if it feels convenient. It is not enough to drag them into church once in a while because you yourself feel obligated once in a while. It is not enough to enroll them in our school and make sure they get into confirmation classes. They need to see your faith in action. You need to teach them the Christian faith. We can help you, but we cannot replace you. Christian education is first and foremost a parental responsibility.

The church grows when people like you and me spread the Word nearby. I don’t know about you, but when I hear a preacher badgering his listeners to “Go into all the world and make disciples”, it makes me feel weak and small and impoverished and lazy. How are we to make disciples of all nations when half our city doesn’t know Jesus or love him? How possibly can this little church reach out to the nations when in the process of trying to reach out in Watertown we are already brushing up against the bank’s credit limit? We are a weak and simple people and the task of taking on the world is beyond us . . . unless our part of taking on the world begins right here, around the kitchen table in our homes, and in this community we know and love. That we can do. We know these people and they know us. We know what makes them tick and what ticks them off and that gives us the advantage. Maybe as we open ourselves up to relationship and conversation and become more hospitable right here in Watertown . . . maybe as more people come to know Jesus here, then we will be able to lend greater support

of those full time missionaries in distant lands.

Few of us have been called to be full time, professional missionaries or church workers, but not one of us gets a pass from being a Christian witness. In Holy Baptism God has made you a witness, and has called each to engage in mission. That happens in your family room. That happens at Tribeca. That happens at Deegs' and at Anytime Fitness, and at the Senior Center, and in the stands at Watertown High School.

When those two disciples of John started following Jesus, he turned and asked "What are you looking for?" Whatever it was they were looking for, they found it in Jesus. I propose to you that, no matter who we are or how old we are; no matter what we do for a living and how much money we have – I propose that we are all, in some way or another, looking for God. One thing we have in common with Andrew and Simon and everyone else in the world is that God has created in us, as someone said, a "God-sized hole in our hearts", which no one but God can fill. In the fourth century Augustine put it this way, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, so that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." And centuries before Jesus was even born, the psalmist wrote, "As the deer pants for streams of flowing water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1-2). And one thing everyone wants is the hope of eternal life. David wrote, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD . . . to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Ps. 27:4).

"What are you looking for?" Ultimately, we are all looking for him: a Savior . . . a Savior from an inconsequential life; a Savior from an aimless life; a Savior from the guilt and damnation of our sin. We are looking for Jesus. "Behold" the Baptist says, pointing to Jesus, he is the Messiah, the Savior, "the Lamb of God." He's the only one who can fill that God-sized

hole. He's the one in whose company you are welcome and at home. He is the one you can follow, wherever he might lead because he loves you and will not lead you astray. He is the Lamb of God on whom you can lay your sins, and he'll take them away. "As far as the east is from the west" he'll take them away. He'll remove them from you and take care of them himself. In fact, in his crucifixion he already has. He is the one who has claimed you in Holy Baptism. He is the one who offers purpose and mission big enough and important enough to commit your life to. He's the one: Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lamb of God. Amen.

