

St. Andrew's Cathedral

Jackson, Mississippi

Sermon for the Feast of St. Andrew 2017

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Many churches and cathedrals throughout history have borne the name of a saint, who is then referred to as the “patron saint” of that congregation. In a perfect world, the congregation in its missional priorities or common life emulates some elements of the character and example of the patron saint. As I was preparing for this celebration of the patron of this Cathedral, St. Andrew, I thought it might be interesting to explore some of the ways this saint has influenced this community of faith since its founding 178 years ago and what his influence might be in the future.

Andrew, originally a follower of John the Baptist, heard the Baptist say as Jesus was coming toward them one day, “Look, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Andrew followed Jesus and is considered to be the first-called of the disciples of Jesus. The exchange between Andrew and another of John’s followers and Jesus recoded in John’s gospel is interesting. It reads, “When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘what are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day” (John 1:38-39a). It sounds as if Andrew gave Jesus his undivided attention on that day when he answered the invitation to “come and see.”

The Reverend Daniel S. Lewis answered the call to leave his home in New York to come as a missionary to Mississippi. He arrived in Jackson in 1839. On April 16, 1839, missionary Bishop Leonidas Polk visited Jackson and held services in the Methodist house of worship. In his journal, Bishop Polk spoke of the “devout attention manifested by these people.” My reading of Sherwood Wise’s remarkable sesquicentennial history of The Cathedral Church of St. Andrew reveals countless occasions when the people of this parish were paying attention to Jesus Christ and earnestly discerning his call to them to follow him into the mission field at their doorstep. My own experience of you is that you are continuing in that same attentive spirit during this time of transition.

The process in which we are now engaged will eventually lead to an invitation for Priests to discern God’s call to be your next Dean. That process is also an invitation for the members of this community of faith to discern what kind of people God is calling you to be in the days ahead. It is a process of mutual discernment. The Priests who are discerning God’s call to come here will be looking just as attentively at you as your leaders will be looking at them.

So, the challenge in the months ahead will be for this generation of disciples in this cathedral community to look at where and who you have been, where and who you are today, and where and who you earnestly believe God is calling you to be in the future when you have a new spiritual leader. So, what can you learn from your patron saint who answered the call of Jesus before any of the others. We might ask the sort of question Andrew asked, “Rabbi Jesus, where are you staying today in Jackson, Mississippi?” And Jesus will most likely respond in the same way, “Come and see.” Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, invites your attention!

The Gospel of John also tells us that Andrew “first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter)” (John 1:41-42). The very first thing he did after he answered the call to be a disciple of Jesus was to go to his brother and invite him to meet the Messiah. Andrew could not have known what Peter would do, what kind of disciple he would be, or what a difference his life and witness would be in the early Church as he led others in the spread of the Gospel in those first days after the Resurrection. All he knew was that he had to tell someone close to him the good news. God did the rest.

There are members of this Cathedral community today whose ancestors were among the earliest members. They are not here because they hold a legacy membership in a private club. They are here because their families took seriously the commission to rear their children to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. They took seriously the Great Commission to teach, baptize, and make disciples, starting with their own households.

John Westerhof wrote a book a generation ago with a title that asked a burning question, “Will Our Children Have Faith?” In it, he explores the role of parents and faith communities in forming the faith of each generation. Someone has recently asked a similarly burning question, “Will our faith have children?” Both questions came to mind as I wondered about how this congregation is doing in the task of forming those closest to us in the Christian faith. Andrew didn’t waste any time bringing his brother to Jesus. There was an urgency about it.

We have been receiving reports on an almost daily basis for several years that The Episcopal Church is declining in members, offerings, and attendance. Similarly, we’re constantly being told that millennials are “leaving the Church” in large numbers. Here’s the thing: I don’t believe this is the Church they are leaving! Do you? Look around. Something’s going on here that is counter cultural and we need to find out what it is and keep doing it. The first place I want to go is to those who are in that generational cohort and ask you what it is about this particular Christian community that attracts you.

Andrew went first to his brother, one closest to him. We can do that too.

On another occasion, Andrew and Philip, who were both given Greek names and were from the little village of Bethsaida on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, encountered some Greek pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. They told Philip, “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” Philip seemed unsure what to do about it so, naturally, he told Andrew. Andrew seems to have said, “Let’s go tell Jesus!” And they did. If telling his brother about Jesus qualifies Andrew as the first domestic missionary, telling Jesus about the Greeks qualifies him as the first foreign missionary.

How about you and how about me? This Cathedral has a heritage of leadership in spreading the gospel here in Jackson, in the State of Mississippi, in the United States, and in foreign countries. You’ve raised up Deacons, Priests, and Bishops, funded seminaries and missionaries, and sent teams of people to do God’s work in far away places with strange sounding names. Will you continue to do that? Are you willing to pledge that to your new spiritual leader? Will you provide leadership in your mission to others who are not so close to you and not so like you? We’re about to get a good reminder of the witness of this Cathedral during the Kneel Ins of the 1960’s. What might lie ahead?

When somebody shows up and asks to see Jesus, will you be like Andrew and make the necessary introductions? That introduction might be a kind word or an invitation to come to coffee hour to see Jesus at work within this community of his own people. Andrew didn't hesitate. Neither should you.

Another time Andrew goes to work is at an event in which Jesus looked up and saw a crowd of 5,000 people coming toward him. It was time to eat and he knew he'd have to feed them if he was going to teach them. Oh. They were gentiles, by the way. He asks Philip "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5). Andrew pipes up and says, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" (John 6:9). You know the rest of the story. Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes and the disciples collect 12 baskets of leftovers.

This Cathedral community feeds homeless people breakfast every Tuesday morning. You support the work of Stewpot, which you helped start in the 1980's. You have a long heritage of supporting the work of other organizations that feed, clothe, house, educate, encourage, and transform people close to home and far away. Will you continue to bring resources to Jesus, no matter how meager, so that he can continue his radical, miraculous, saving work in the world?

So, whether it is reflecting on how you will respond to the call to introduce your Savior to those closest to you, to those who are not like you, or those with a pressing need, the call is from Jesus to you and this community of those who are his followers. In response to Andrew's introduction of the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus, Jesus said, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (John 12:25-26). Andrew set the pace, for all the other disciples of Jesus in his day and for you and me. What can we learn from his example?

Oh, you know the tradition that Andrew was crucified at Patrae in Achaia upon a *crux decussata*, an X-shaped cross, thereafter known as St. Andrew's Cross. That's why we wear red today, the color for the feast day of a martyr, one whose witness was the ultimate sacrifice. I don't think it is likely to cost you that much to follow the example of St. Andrew in following Jesus. But it will cost you something. And it will require that you rely on the means of God's grace to accomplish your high calling, because if you could do it all by yourself, you wouldn't need God, now, would you?