

We're going to have a couple rounds of baptisms at St. Paul's in the next 5 weeks.

We will ask the traditional questions that we ask at every baptism. After promising to renounce sin and the evil powers of this world, those being baptized are asked three questions. "Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?"

In our baptisms, we promise to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And yet, we are often hesitant to talk about it.

I think part of the problem is that there are other Christian groups that put so much emphasis on "accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior." I hear that phrase thrown about so often that I don't even stop to think about what it means. I'm sure you've heard it too. It's hard to grow up in this part of the country without experiencing people coming up and asking, "Are you saved? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?"

Personally, my biggest problem with such questions is the use of the word, "Personal." Personal Lord and Savior. Yes, choosing to serve Jesus Christ is a personal choice all of us must make. Yes, Jesus' dying on the cross took away my specific sins. Yes, I relate to Jesus on a personal level, as a person I can talk to, not as an abstraction. And yes, I like the song from the late 80's by Depeche Mode, ("Your own personal Jesus..."). Actually I like Johnny Cash's cover of that song even better.

And yet, it's awfully egotistical for me to think that Jesus Christ came into the world just to save Jim Haney. That's the tiniest most miniscule part of what he did, and I'm thankful for it. But if I focus too much on what Christ has done for me personally, I can get into spiritual trouble quickly.

That's why I love the part of the Gospel according to St. John that we read this morning. In this morning's Gospel reading, John the Baptizer points others toward Jesus. He says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

The focus of our salvation is not Jesus taking away all the individual sins of people in the world, though that does happen. The true focus of our salvation is Jesus taking away the sin of the world; Jesus taking away the tendency of all creation to draw away from God, the tendency to put ourselves first, the tendency to want to do things our own way instead of God's way. Jesus comes to heal the breach. Jesus comes to bridge the chasm between the world and God. Jesus comes to offer salvation to all, not just to a few.

Jesus Christ is my personal Lord and Savior. But much more importantly, Jesus Christ is the savior and redeemer of the whole world, not just an assortment of individuals. In our individualist American society, we have a tendency only to look out for ourselves, only to look out for our own interests. This extends to our religion. We want our own personal God. We want a God that takes care of us. We're less concerned with a God who wants to take care of everyone. It's all too easy for to fall into the trap of wanting to keep God walled up as our own little personal Lord. And this is a tendency we need to resist.

So when someone on the street asks, "Are you saved brother?", I usually respond, "Yes, isn't it wonderful."

And when they ask, "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?", I'll usually answer, if I'm in a hurry, the same way: "Yes, isn't it wonderful." But if I have a little time, or if I'm feeling theologically playful, I'll usually stop and say, "Yeah, but is having him as my personal Savior is the main point? Shouldn't the main point be to share him with everyone?"

Again, that's what happens in our Gospel lesson. John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God, and he testifies that he saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove. Then, John points Jesus out to 2 of his disciples. One of them is Andrew.

Andrew is so impressed by Jesus that he brings his brother Simon Peter to meet him. Andrew isn't content to have a personal monopoly on Jesus. Andrew goes and gets his brother Simon, whom Jesus will nickname Peter or "Rocky." Andrew says, "We've found the Messiah. 'We've found the guy. You've got to come with us.'

And so Andrew brings Simon Peter to Jesus. And something similar happens in the next paragraph. We didn't read it this morning. Actually it's our gospel lesson for this Sunday next year.

After Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus, there are 2 more disciples following a similar pattern. Philip brings Nathaniel with him to meet Jesus. Before the first chapter of John is over, we have two disciples bringing two more disciples to Jesus.

It has been said that the cross has two directions, vertical and horizontal. The vertical direction symbolizes our relationship with God. And this is important. But we mustn't forget that Christianity also has a horizontal dimension. We are called to have a relationship with each other as members of the church, and members of the body of Christ. Too often, it's all too easy to focus on the vertical dimension, the me and God dimension, and forget about the 'we-ness,' the 'us-ness,' the horizontal dimension of Christianity.

If St. Andrew had just functioned on a me and Jesus model of Christianity, where would the church be? If Andrew had just worried about his personal relationship with Jesus, he wouldn't have brought his brother Simon to Jesus, and Simon wouldn't have become the great St. Peter who meant so much to the early church. In a way, we're not sure what else Andrew did. We assume that he's not one of the most important disciples, because he didn't do much that was recorded as being memorable. And yet he did something very important—he gave the church the gift of having a St. Peter, for if it wasn't for Andrew bringing his brother along, there might not have been any St. Peter.

78 years ago, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, wrote,
"We do not know very much about Andrew; but we do know a great deal about his brother, and he was Andrew's convert. Who shall say that Peter himself did more for his Lord than Andrew who brought Peter to Him?"

And then Bishop Temple continues:

"We never know who is doing the greatest work for God. Here is a man who holds great office in the Church and preaches to multitudes; yet at the end, all he has done is to keep things from falling back. And there is a girl, poor and uneducated, of whom no one ever thinks; but because she is loving and devout, she sows the seed of life in a child entrusted to her care who grows up to be a missionary... or Christian statesman, or profound theologian; shaping the history of nations or the thought of generations. Andrew findeth his own brother; perhaps it is a great a service to the Church as ever any man did."¹

Being one of the Church's great worldwide leaders, like Peter, is out of reach for most of us. Yet bringing others to Jesus, like Andrew did, is something we can do.

Jesus calls us to relationship with him. But he also calls us to relationship with each other. And he also calls us to bring others into that fellowship as well.

Sharing our faith with others does not mean we have to start standing on the street corner, asking people if they're saved and putting a notch in the spine of our Bible every time we get someone to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

But we do need to consider if we're open enough about telling others what Jesus has done for us.

Like Andrew, you can bring others to Jesus. Andrew simply says, "Come and see."

We do this all the time in our secular lives. We say the equivalent of 'Come and see' over and over again.

"Hey, have you seen this movie? Well, you really need to see it."

"Hey, have you eaten at this wonderful restaurant? You ought to try it, the food is great."

"Hey, I've got an extra ticket to the game. Do you want to come with me?"

And yet, when it comes to our faith, we clam up. We keep our religion private. We're very hesitant to share our faith with those around us. And yet, the reality is, most people don't come to a new church because of the signs. It's not the Facebook page or the website.

Most people still visit a church because they're invited by their friends. It's the #1 most effective way of bringing people to begin the path of discipleship is to invite them. That's something you can do. Make that invitation, "Come and see."

'Do you want to come with me to church? We've got lots of exciting things going on. The people are great. The priest is a little weird, but it's a great place anyway. St. Paul's has meant a lot to me. Will you come join us this Sunday?'

¹ *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, p. 28

Those are ways of saying, "Come and see." That's the way to get people started on the Christian path. Not a hard sell. But a simple invitation.

That's the most effective way of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. You make the invitation, "Come and see." Then let Jesus make the invitation, "Follow me."