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Sermon
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Park Congregational Church
Worcester, Massachusetts

“Just An Ordinary Disciple”

Scripture Text: John 1:35-42

Dear people of God, most of us probably think that we're just ordinary people. Most of us don't expect to be listed in *Who's Who* or win a Nobel Prize in some field. Most of us will never hold public office, not even serving on our city or town council. Most of us will never become or never were professional athletes. Most of us were not born with a silver spoon in our mouths. Perhaps some of us can trace our ancestors to the Revolutionary War or to the *Mayflower*, but most of us, I think, are like the person who said, “I wasn't born in a log cabin like some of the great men of our country, but I want you to know that just as soon as my family was able to afford one, we bought it and moved in!”

Most of us are just plain old everyday folks. But then, most everyone is ordinary. I don't say this to discourage you. In fact, most of Christ's followers in history were unknown to fame. They were persons who lived simple routine lives. Very few ever took notice of them. They

did their daily work, and in their own humble way, they strove to the end until God called them to heaven. That's the lot of the overwhelming majority of Christians.

Yet, many ordinary people have lived a life that wielded a powerful influence on others. This morning I would like to tell you about one such person in the Bible. His name was Andrew. We're not told very much about Andrew. He never wrote any Gospel or Letter in the New Testament. We never read that he preached a sermon, like his brother Peter. He wasn't in the inner circle of Jesus's disciples, like Peter, John, and James. In fact, he's mentioned in the Bible only eight times, and some of those instances only in passing.

Andrew was just an ordinary man, an ordinary man who nevertheless did powerful things. He was a lot like most of us. In fact, if we could be just like Andrew, then we would be doing pretty well for ourselves in terms of our faithfulness.

Unlike others in the Bible like Elijah and Jonah, Andrew doesn't try to run away from God. When he hears Jesus for the first time, he follows him, and then quickly goes to his brother, Peter, and exclaims, "We have found the Messiah!" Andrew had made a glorious discovery in his life. It

was an earth-shattering moment for him. He would never look at the world in the same way again. Andrew had found salvation. Jesus had made himself known to him. John the Baptist had introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. This ignited something in Andrew's heart. There was something missing in Andrew's life. There was an emptiness there, a hunger that had not been satisfied. That Jesus asks him, "What are you seeking?" indicates that Andrew was on a search for something that he had not yet found.

Psychiatrists tell us that there are four things all persons ask in one way or another. They are, "How can I be useful?", "How do I get rid of my guilt?", "How can I love?", and "How do I find a feeling of security?". Much of life is spent searching to find the answers to these questions. Unfortunately some never find them.

There's a true story of a couple on Valentine's Day enjoying a romantic drive in the back woods of Louisiana. Suddenly, something white, shimmering in the trees, caught their eyes. Their investigation led them to a dead teenager hanging from a limb, a white bed sheet knotted tightly around his neck. A farewell note was near the trunk of the tree. It was addressed simply, "Mom and Dad." The note read:

I never did develop into a real person and I cannot tolerate the false and empty existence I have created. What frustrated me most in the last year was that I had built no ties to family or friends. There was nothing of lasting worth and value. I led a detached existence. I am a bomb of frustration and should never marry or have children. It is safest to defuse the bomb harmlessly now. Simply cremate me as John Doe.

As if that were not tragic enough, the authorities circulated the youth's description and fingerprints to police stations across the country, yet he was never identified or claimed by anyone. He was buried anonymously in an unmarked grave.

Can it be true that there are such persons walking around, people who are empty and lack any fulfillment? This example may not be as extreme as you might think. There are perhaps millions of people who are just drifting through life without any sense of purpose or direction, who would be willing to be sent to prison, if only they could find some companionship there. And sadly, some of them commit crimes only to attain some attention.

Well, Andrew was searching for something in his life. He had a hungry heart and he knew that Jesus could satisfy that hunger. He wanted to know where Jesus was dwelling. He wanted to spend time getting to know Jesus and learning from him.

“Where are you staying, Jesus?” Andrew asks (John 1:38). Jesus replies, “Come and see” (John 1:39). Or literally, “Come and you will see.” Andrew was really saying, “I’m missing something,” and Jesus is really answering, “Come, and I’ll tell you what it is.” And so, Andrew and an unnamed disciple follow Jesus and spend the day with him. Then the Gospel writer makes an interesting note. He tells us what time it is. About 4:00 in the afternoon, something wonderful happens to Andrew. We don’t know right away what it is. But he goes and gets his brother, Peter, and tells him excitedly, “We have found the Messiah! We have found the Christ!” (John 1:41). That word, *found*, is very engaging. The word here means to make a marvelous discovery. Andrew runs down to the shore where Peter is docking his fishing boat, and he shouts, “Peter, Peter, I’ve found it! I’ve got it!” What had he found? He had found the Messiah. And in so doing, he had found what he had been searching for in life. The Gospel writer records the time because it was the greatest day and hour in the life of Andrew. It was the day and hour when he had found Jesus.

Some Christians believe that unless you know the exact day, hour, minute, and second that you became born again, then you aren’t really a

Christian. I don't agree with them. Some of you were raised in Christian homes, and so, there was never a day in your life when you did not consider yourself to be a Christian. Others of you are aware when you first committed your life to Christ, and may even know the day, as I do, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you were not a Christian before then. The Christian journey is a lifelong process of spiritual growth and fellowship with Christ. It can't be pinned down to just one minute or hour. I have met several persons, who at one time in their lives claimed to be "born again," who later in life when I ran into them again, claimed no longer to believe in God. Nevertheless we need to be careful about judging people and saying things like, "Well, he's not a Christian" or "they're not really Christians in those churches." There are quite a few in other Christian denominations who say such things about us and about our denomination. We should not imitate them. That doesn't serve God's kingdom. That doesn't serve God's church.

Today is Ecumenical Sunday, the beginning of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has been at the forefront of the ecumenical movement since our inception in 1957. Our denomination's logo is right on the front cover of

our bulletin: “that they may all be one.” This is not a made-up logo. This was said by none other than Jesus Christ himself on the last night of his life when he was alone with his disciples in the Upper Room. It was his final wish that his followers would be united. Jesus demands that there be a visible show of unity of his people in the world. Though different denominations and individual Christians may do things differently, may believe differently, and may worship differently, we are all on the same team. Each community of believers, as a local expression of the worldwide Church, is gathered together in Jesus Christ by our Creator God through the Holy Spirit. And each individual believer within that community is called by God in Christ through the Spirit.

The important thing is that each one of us must find what we are searching for in life. And once we find it, we must find that expression of it which is most satisfying to us. I hope that what you find most satisfying is Christ. The fact that you choose to worship in a progressive Protestant church, such as this one, tells me that you are most comfortable in a tolerant, inclusive atmosphere of Christian worship. If that’s what you want for yourself, I would think that you want the same thing for others as well. I know that several of you invite your friends to church, and

that's wonderful that you do that. We offer many opportunities to invite others, not just to worship service, but also to Bible Study, Movie Matinee, our church suppers, Game Night, Youth Group, Sunday School, and several other activities.

The first thing that Andrew does when he finds his purpose and meaning in life is to go and tell his brother, Peter, how he can find it also. Now, we remember that Andrew is just an ordinary person, and so, he doesn't try to steal the limelight from his brother. No doubt, he lived in the shadow of his brother his whole life. Even the way that he's addressed in this passage, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother," shows that his own identity was inexorably tied to his brother. People did not know Andrew the person, as much as they knew Andrew, the brother of Peter. Now Andrew could have come to Peter, saying, "I know something you don't know." He could have put himself in the spotlight for once. He could have made sure that Peter and the others would notice that he's hanging around this rabbi, Jesus, a lot as if he were Jesus's right hand man. And when they would ask him, "Why are you spending so much time with this guy?" he could have answered, "None of your business. He thinks that I'm important." He could have tried to get on the good side of

Jesus, and make himself prominent, to the exclusion of Peter and all their friends.

But Andrew does none of those things. He rushes to tell Peter what he has found. It shows the real faith of this young man that he was prepared to follow Christ no matter what would happen. How does Andrew feel as time goes by and Jesus draws closer and closer to Peter, and Andrew, it seems, becomes an outsider among the twelve disciples? After all, Peter wouldn't have even come to Jesus if it weren't for Andrew's bringing him. Was he jealous? Maybe we would be. But there's no indication at all in the New Testament that Andrew has any resentment toward his brother. He simply in his plain manner does what he can for Jesus, and he does it to the glory of God in faith.

Andrew knew what his gift was. He couldn't preach like his brother. He knew that he couldn't get up in front of large crowds and hold them spellbound. He knew that he wasn't a writer like those who wrote the Gospels and the apostle Paul. He knew his limitations. But what's more important, he knew his gift. And he uses his gift.

Maybe some of you haven't become more involved in Park Church because you can't sing like our choir members, you can't teach Sunday

School, you can't read the Bible lessons in front of people. But you know what? God isn't interested in what you can't do. God is interested in what you can do. God has equipped each one of you here for some important work in the church.

There were many things that Andrew could not do. But there was one thing that he could do. He could tell others about Jesus. He could be a fisher of persons. Almost every time Andrew is mentioned in the New Testament, he is bringing someone to Jesus. That was his gift. The first thing he did after committing to following Jesus was to bring his brother Peter to him.

Are there any Andrews in our midst? Do any of you have a gift to bring people to Jesus? Andrew was just an ordinary disciple. Yet he was given a marvelous gift that helped to build the Church as much as his brother Peter did. The Church consists largely of ordinary disciples like Andrew who take the time to invite others to Jesus.

Why don't you give it a try? Invite a friend to church. Invite someone to our church supper coming up on February 8. Invite someone to Game Night. Better yet. Make the commitment yourself to become more involved in the life of the church. The more you will be involved,

the more you will get out of it and the more you will deepen your meaning and purpose in life. Amen.