

Me an Evangelist? You've Got to be Kidding?

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on January 17, 1999.
Scripture lesson: John 1:29-42.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

Way back in 1955, when I was in fifth grade, my best friend, Jackie Alexander, invited me to go with him and his dad to old Connie Mack Stadium in Philadelphia to see the Phillies play. I'd never been to a major league baseball game. I wasn't even a baseball fan. But I responded to the invitation and had a memorable time. I really didn't understand a lot of what was going on but it was a life changing experience for me. After the game, Jackie's dad took us to an exit gate where we waited for the players and umpires to leave. Jackie's dad served in World War 2 with Auggie Donatelli who later became a major league umpire. When he saw the umpire Jackie's dad yelled out, "Hey, Auggie, how 'bout an autograph?" And Auggie Donatelli came over, shook hands, talked briefly with Mr. Alexander and autographed a sheet of paper. Just about then Richie Ashburn, Granny Hamner and Del Ennis were leaving and we got their autographs. I wadded up the paper and stuffed it in my pocket. I still have those autographs. Up till then I'd never even listened to a Phillies game. After that, I developed a lifelong passion for the Phillies. All because a friend invited me to go to a game.

I have a friend who loves to sing. He's sung in church choirs. He's sung in quartets. His song solos. I asked him how he developed his interest in singing. Did your parents make you take singing lessons? No! Did they make you sing in the church choir when you were a kid? No! Well, how did you develop such a passion for music and singing. "When I was in 9th grade my junior high music teacher announced that there'd be try-outs for the 9th grade a-capella choir. I never even thought about trying out. Had absolutely no interest. But when I was leaving the room my teacher took me aside. 'I've heard you singing in class. You have a wonderful voice. I'd really like you to try out for the choir. Will you?' I didn't really want to but, just to please her I said, 'Sure.' I tried out. Got accepted to the choir. And the rest is history. I was introduced to music I'd never have known about. It was a life-changing experience for me." All because someone cared enough to invite him to sing.

Andrew cared enough to invite his brother to meet Jesus. Andrew was a fisherman. He was also a patriot. He loved his nation and hated the Roman oppressors. He longed for a strong, charismatic Jewish leader to kick out the Romans and establish a kingdom based on God's laws. Then he met Jesus. He spent a whole day with Jesus, listening to him, talking to him, watching him. Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the one he was looking for. The Messiah. The King anointed by God to destroy the wicked and establish his own kingdom. Andrew was so excited that he found his brother Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah!" Andrew invited Simon to meet Jesus. Simon responded to the invitation. Today we know Simon as

Simon Peter, the foremost leader among Christ's apostles. **All because of a simple invitation.** *AN INTERESTING FACT ABOUT ANDREW. ALWAYS INVITING ... A BOY WITH A SMALL LUNCH. SOME GREEKS*

My guess is that we've all had our lives changed in significant ways by an invitation.

Someone invited you to a party where you met the one who became your life partner. You got invited to a dinner and met someone who offered you a new job. *A hobby or life interest.* **Invitations can also lead us down the path of destruction.** I visited a young man in a detox center. In his early twenties. An alcoholic. What happened? How did you get this way? Were your parents alcoholics? No! "I was invited to a party when I was in high school. Somebody brought a keg of beer. We had a good old time and we got away with it. Pretty soon I was drinking three, four or more beers every Friday night. I just drank to get a buzz. But then it got control of me." An alcoholic. Because he responded to an invitation.

Last week I attended a seminar in Richmond, Virginia. How main-line churches can grow in quantity and quality. One reason main line churches are not growing is because we're **not inviting people.** We aren't inviting people to come **to church.** We're not inviting people to join **the choir.** We're not inviting people to come **to Sunday School.** People are welcome if they show up, but we're not inviting them. Some feel that inviting people is too pushy. Some don't invite their unchurched friends because their unchurched friends don't seem interested. Just like me in fifth grade. I wasn't interested in baseball until a friend invited me. Just like my singer friend who wasn't interested in music until his music teacher invited him to try out for the choir. But an invitation changed us. An invitation led to a life changing experience.

Next week is Invite A Friend Sunday. It was fantastic to see our Fellowship Hall filled last Sunday evening with members and friends of our church. Time was spent sharing with one another why we're members, why we attend, what's special about Oxford Presbyterian Church. Some of us started coming to church, not because we were invited, but because we were brought by a parent. You in turn have brought your children. But each generation has less children. Today, unless you're Amish a church won't grow by biological growth. We've got to invite people. **How many of you first came to church because you were invited? Who invited you? How did they invite you? Take a few minutes to write down names of people to invite. How will you invite them? By telephone? By a card or letter? Face to face? When will you invite them? What fears do you have?**

Why invite people to church? We really want people to meet Jesus. Like Simon Peter met Jesus because his brother Andrew invited him. We want people to meet Jesus. People have life changing experiences when they meet Jesus. Jesus is alive. Jesus is the risen Lord. He's King of kings and Lord of lords. He's the Way, the Truth and the Life. He's the source of *all* life. Apart from him there is *no* life. He's the water of life. He's the bright and morning star. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Nothing is more important for us as a church than that we become an inviting church. that, through us, other men and women and young people meet Jesus Christ. God has called us to be an inviting church because **God is an inviting God. Jesus is an inviting Savior.** Jesus invites us to come to him. He invites our friends. He invites our enemies. He invites us all. **"Come unto me,** all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls."**"Behold I stand at the door and knock.** If anyone hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me."**"The Bride says, 'Come!' and the Spirit says, 'Come!'** and whosoever will, let them come and take of the water of life freely." God invites us and has called us into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.