

Operation Andrew

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church meeting at Mary Dodd Chapel (Lincoln University) on 12th Sunday after Pentecost August 6, 1989: Scripture Lessons: John 1:35-42a; John 6:5-13; 12:20-22.

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

John Honour was one of my best friends in high school. His father claimed to be an atheist. After my father's death I was talking with John's dad. "Ted", he said. "I want you to know how highly I thought of your father. He'd come down to visit in the summer and we'd sit out in the back yard and talk over a can of beer. He knew I wasn't a believer. He'd ask me, 'Jack, why don't you believe in Jesus? I can't understand that!' And I'd try to explain. He'd just sit and listen. He didn't argue. He didn't condemn me to hell. He never converted me but I've never thought so much about God and Christ since."

After my first year in college, I hitch-hiked up to Minnesota to visit John where his family had moved. He'd bought a red 1950 Ford for only \$25 and we drove through Canada, down through New York, back to Delaware. It was a great car. Every time we stopped for gas we'd add a quart of oil. In those days gas station attendants pumped gas, washed your windows and always asked to check the oil. We stopped at a gas station in Canada out in the middle of nowhere. John and I were looking under the hood while the attendant checked the oil. He was looking directly at the dip stick when he said, "Are you born again?" John said, "What?" He turned with a wild and intense look in his eyes and pointing the dip stick right at John he asked, "Are you washed in the blood?" John looked at me quizzically. I responded, "No, John's lost and going to hell if he doesn't repent." John's only comment after we left was, "Man, that guy was weird!"

I like the way my father evangelised better than the way the gas station attendant did. D.T. Niles, a Christian from Ceylon who died several

years ago, used to say that evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find the Bread of Life.

Presbyterians have a tendency to be turned off by evangelism. It smacks of emotionalism and conjurs up images of Jimmy Swaggart. It smacks Of manipulation. Many Presbyterians don't want anything to do with evangelistic campaigns like Encounter 89. One man recently said, "Don't expect me to go to those Encounter 89 meetings. When I was a kid my mother dragged me to revival services every summer where I was born again and again and again and again."

But many Presbyterians are also turned off by evangelism because we've been more influenced by the principles of the 18th century German enlightenment than we realize. For the heirs of the Enlightenment religion is in the realm of personal feelings, not objective or historical truth. It's *absurd and morally arrogant*, the heirs of the Enlightenment say, to claim that a person's eternal destiny is dependant upon an historical event such as the death of a Palestinian Jew 2000 years ago.

And yet when a person knows Jesus as Savior and Lord there's a desire to share the good news. In Christ we see that the God who created the universe is God for us and with us. In the person of Christ God takes the world's sin, injustice and suffering upon God's-self and goes to hell for us. Because we know Christ as the risen and living Lord we believe that if we lift up Christ all the world will be drawn to him and swords will be beaten into ploughshares and the meek shall inherit the earth and the hungry be filled.

And yet we Presbyterians feel so uncomfortable about evangelism. We want others to know Jesus but we're so reserved. We don't want to offend. We're like the old reserved Scotsman who told his pastor, "I love my wife so

much that sometimes I can hardly keep from telling her."

I believe St Andrew can show us a kind of evangelism that reserved Presbyterians can be comfortable with. Andrew was one of the twelve Apostles. He's mentioned three times in the Gospel of John. Each time he's mentioned, he's bringing others to Jesus. Andrew first brings Peter to Jesus. In chapter 6 he brings a lad to Jesus. Later Andrew wanted to introduce Greeks to Jesus.

I want to draw your attention to the first reference to Andrew where he finds his brother and brings him to Jesus. Andrew began with someone he already knew. He already had a personal relationship with his brother. All of us have friends, relatives, neighbors who need to be brought to Jesus. Over the years we've shared concerns with one another. Trust has developed. Your friend or neighbor knows that you're a Christian... knows that the church is important in your life and yet they've noticed that you don't put them down when they do something that violates your own values and faith. And because of your relationship there's an openness that allows you to share your faith without implying moral superiority.

How do you bring these people to Jesus? Obviously we can't convert anybody. But we can bring people into the presence of Christ. Parents bring a child to Jesus in baptism. At the baptismal font Jesus promises to give that child a new birth and wash away its sin. Afterwards we bring them to Jesus in the Sunday School.

When you've developed a relationship of trust with someone you can also bring them to Christ where he's present in the worship service, or to a Sunday School class or to a Bible study that takes place in a home.

You can also take your friend to a jail cell, or to a hospital room, or to a homeless shelter to meet Jesus because Jesus says that we'll find him

there among the least of his brothers and sisters.

And you can take them with you to Encounter 89 in September. Many churches in the Oxford area are participating in Encounter 89. That's one of the most exciting things about Encounter 89. Baptists, Mennonites, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Nazarenes will be working together to bring others to Christ.

Ordinarily, Presbyterian Evangelism consists of a new members class or a confirmation class. ^{OR for children: in the home, S.S. worship...} At the end of these classes we hope that people who don't know Jesus will come to know him. This is the way Presbyterians prefer evangelism to take place... decently and in order. But some people go through these classes and still don't really know Jesus. Years later they find Christ, sometimes as a result of evangelistic services.

I had a friend, a Presbyterian minister who wanted his teenage daughter to make a personal decision for Christ. He prayed that through the confirmation class... the retreats, discussions, Bible studies and service projects she'd come to profess her own faith in Christ as Lord. He wanted her to be saved respectably.

Before the confirmation classes began, a Billy Graham crusade came to the Pittsburgh area where they lived. She attended with her father and responded when Billy Graham asked people to come forward to receive Christ. Later her father confessed to me, "You can't imagine the embarrassment I felt. This isn't the way Presbyterians are supposed to get saved. But", he said, "that night really changed my daughter's life. She really came to know Christ even though it wasn't the way I preferred."

Encounter 89 provides just one more avenue by which a person may be pointed to Christ. And you, like St Andrew, could use this opportunity to bring someone to Jesus.

I'd urge you to make a mental list of people you already know... maybe someone whose a member of our church but has become inactive... maybe a friend or neighbor. Pray for them daily. And then ask them to come with you to Encounter 89... or to church or Sunday School.

Most likely your friend or neighbor is already in a covenant relationship with Christ through baptism as an infant. That baptism may mean nothing to them today. Maybe they once made a confession of faith in Jesus Christ but have fallen away. They don't go to church. They don't show any interest in God or Christ. Nevertheless I'd urge you to approach them, not as a pagan, but as a brother or sister who's already a member of the family. Over one half of all Protestants are unchurched. They've made a confession of faith but they've become inactive. That baptism, that confession can be a point of contact for you. "I know you were baptized... you made a profession of faith. I believe you were sincere in that confession. Why don't you come with me to Encounter 89? I need moral support."

Be honest with them about your feelings. You might say, "I'm a Presbyterian and I really feel uncomfortable about evangelistic tent meetings. I want to go but I don't want to go by myself. Will you go with me. I'd feel much more comfortable and maybe it will do us both some good."

God uses ordinary people like Andrew and like you and me to bring others to Jesus. Andrew brought his brother to Jesus. He brought a young man with loaves and fishes to Jesus. He brought some Greek travelers to Jesus. We can bring people to Jesus... to where Jesus is at work in the world and in the church.

Let us pray: Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your Holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and for ever. Amen.