

Bit Players of the Bible: Andrew
John 1: 35-42
January 29, 2012
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Omaha, Nebraska

How many of you have a brother or a sister? And how many of you had times when you were jealous of one of your siblings? When you felt that (as comedian Tommy Smothers used to say) that mom liked your brother or sister best? Or maybe you felt overshadowed by your siblings in some way? (The brother who was a star athlete or the sister who graduated at the top of her class).

Probably most of us with brothers or sisters experienced sibling rivalry at some point. And it can start very early. As many of you know, Rick and I have twin grandchildren, Finn and Cassidy, who just turned two. Our daughter Erica says that Finn thinks he should have been born an only child. From the time Finn was just a few months old, whenever Erica holds Cassidy, Finn gets very upset, throwing himself on the floor and wailing because (at least for that moment) he believes that Mom likes Cassidy best.

As we continue our sermon series on Bit Players of the Bible, today we are looking at Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. That's how we know him—forever in the shadow of his more famous brother. You have to wonder if Andrew ever wanted to say to his brother, "Jesus always liked you best." Though both brothers were among Jesus' twelve disciples, a quick look at an online concordance reveals who got all the press. Andrew is mentioned about 13 times in the New Testament. His brother Peter, on the other hand, gets 156 citations. It is Peter who walked on water. Peter who is

called the rock on which Jesus will build his church. Peter who preaches the stirring sermon on Pentecost which convinces 3000 to become followers of Christ. In the drama of Jesus' ministry, Peter has a starring role while Andrew is clearly only a bit player.

But Andrew does one very important thing, as we see in our scripture for today, which comes from the gospel of John's account of how the two brothers came to be followers of Jesus.

35 The next day John [the Baptist] again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 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?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). 42 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)

Did you catch the very important thing that Andrew did? It was Andrew who told his brother Simon Peter about Jesus. It was Andrew who brought Peter to meet the Messiah. Without Andrew, no Peter. And without Peter, the whole of the history of the Christian church would have been different. As we are learning in our series, biblical bit players may be minor characters, but they can have major impact. Bit player Andrew is often called the first Christian and the first evangelist, for it was he who shared the good news of the Jesus Christ with his brother.

As far as the Bible goes, Andrew pretty much falls off the radar after the first chapter of the book of Acts, but as with all of Jesus' original twelve disciples, myth, tradition, and speculation fill in the blanks. Andrew is said to have been martyred by

crucifixion in the Greek city of Achaea. Tradition teaches that Andrew, by his own request, was bound to an X-shaped cross because he did not believe he was worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. This X-shaped cross is now known as the cross of St. Andrew. (Remember that X-shaped cross—we're going to come back to it.)

Along about the 9th century, St. Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland. In fact, it is the X-shaped cross of St. Andrew that appears on the Scottish flag. The myth is that a Scottish general prayed to St. Andrew before a battle, vowing that if Andrew gave his army victory, he would make Andrew the patron saint of Scotland. On the morning of the battle, white clouds formed an X-shaped cross in the sky, which so emboldened the Scottish army that they were victorious despite being greatly outnumbered.

So, does this X-shaped cross of St. Andrew remind you of anything? It is the cross that is on the chalice that is the Disciple logo. This cross was chosen for a couple of reasons—one is that it is a reminder of our Scottish Presbyterian roots. But more importantly, the cross of St. Andrew is a reminder of the importance of the ministry of each and every person and the importance of evangelism—of saying to friends and families and co-workers just what Andrew said to his brother, “Come and meet the Christ.”

I also think the cross of St. Andrew is a good symbol for our denomination the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) because in many ways we, as a denomination, are sort of a bit player. We sure aren't the biggest or the best known. We don't have the name recognition of Methodists or Baptists or Episcopalians or Presbyterians or Lutherans. If someone asks you what denomination you belong to, and you reply the

Christian Church, people will usually say, “Yeah, I’m a Christian, too. But what denomination are you?” And if you say, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), they look puzzled and say, “Never heard of it.”

Like Andrew overshadowed by his better known brother, we can be overshadowed by better known mainline Protestant denominations. But like Andrew, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has played a pivotal role in church history, one that we can be very proud of.

Today you and I can go into any mainline Protestant church and be greeted as a brother or sister in Christ and be welcomed at the celebration of communion. But two hundred years ago when the movement that became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was started, things were very different.

In 1807 Thomas Campbell, one of the founders of our denomination, emigrated from Scotland to serve as a pastor along what was then the American frontier, in western Pennsylvania. Campbell was a clergyman of the Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church. The name suggests how very divided the church was in those days. As Campbell travelled to the scattered communities along the frontier, he found pioneers hungry to hear to word of God—and to share in the sacrament of communion. But as a minister of the Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church, he was forbidden to serve communion to anyone but members of his own little Presbyterian sect. Thomas convinced of the oneness of Christ’s church and that God’s table should be open to everyone, did what was in those days unthinkable—he began to serve communion to anyone who came to his services—to Baptists and Lutherans and

Methodists, even to New Light Pro-Burgher Non-Seceder Presbyterians. The ecclesiastical authorities promptly kicked him out of the church.

Meanwhile, back in Scotland, his son Alexander was reaching a similar conclusion. In those days, members of the Presbyterian Church had to pass a rigorous examination by the church elders to be deemed morally fit to take communion. Those who passed were given a little token to present at the communion rail, proving that they had passed the test and were worthy. To Alexander, this seemed wrong. He believed that the ones who most needed communion were often the ones who were turned away. So one communion Sunday, as he came up holding his communion token, he threw it down and walked out of church. Alexander, like his father, was convinced that the Table of the Lord was for all believers.

And down in Kentucky, another Presbyterian minister named Barton Stone was coming to the very same conclusion. In a time of deep divisions in the Body of Christ, a time when each tiny little Christian sect claimed to have a monopoly on God's truth, the Stone/Campbell movement that is the ancestor of our church, was a shining beacon of hope, unity, and a thoughtful, reasonable faith. In extraordinarily important ways—an enlightened understanding of the openness of the Lord's Table, an emphasis on individual judgment rather than creeds, a reverence for the authority of the scriptures, an empowerment of lay leadership, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, the early ordination of women, and a passion for Christian unity—the little frontier movement that became the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) foreshadowed much that characterizes mainline Protestant churches of today.

The Statement of Identity for our denomination says that, "we are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one Body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcome us." That is who we are as a denomination, but I think it is a wonderful vision for who we can be as individual Christians. Even as bit players, we can believe in, proclaim, and work for wholeness in a fragmented world, welcoming, inviting, loving as God's has welcomed, loved, and invited us.