

John 1:43-51 (NRSV)

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Matthew 5:13-16 (NRSV)

¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Today, we begin a new sermon series: Crosstraining. In the coming weeks, we'll resolve to embrace holy habits which can transform our relationship with God and with one another as we seek to be increasingly mature and capable disciples of Jesus Christ.

The stated mission of St. Andrew, like all UMC churches, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Since 2002, we've proclaimed that our vision for accomplishing that mission is centered upon God's call to be an inviting, worshiping, learning, loving, and serving people. As our church has grown, so has our vision of what God has placed us here to do. In keeping with this expanded vision, we are embracing seven holy habits that encompass our lives and commission as Jesus' disciples. In this sermon series, we'll take a look at all seven: *inviting, worshiping, learning, praying, caring, giving, and serving*. Then, we'll examine three Old Testament stories of discipleship “heroes” taken from the book of Hebrews: Rahab, Abraham, and David. And then it will be Palm Sunday!¹

Cross-training

I've never been too good at New Year's resolutions. I've certainly made my share, but keeping them has always been another matter. There's even been a sameness to them year after year, always some variation on the theme of eating better, losing weight, and exercising more. But I've never found that my resolve to actually accomplish those things matched up with the calendar. Thus, in recent years, I've dropped the pretense of New Year's resolutions.

But this year could be different. Robert Hasley has challenged us all to embrace one or more of the seven holy habits that make up St. Andrew's vision statement. Note the “one or more.” A resolution to completely remake my life around all seven habits would probably end up in my resolutions dustbin. But resolving to genuinely move forward on a few of the seven, even one, that's doable. In 2006, many of us resolved to read through the entire Bible and hundreds of us kept that resolution. Now is a good time to revisit our resolve and take some concrete and lasting steps toward a deeper, more authentic, life-changing relationship with God as revealed in Jesus Christ, for such a relationship is what we mean by “discipleship.”

¹If you don't already know it, Easter this year will be about as early as it can come, March 23. The formula for determining the date of Easter is a little complicated: Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. Gratefully, we have calendars that figure this out for us!

The first disciples

The gospel of John opens with John's "In the beginning was the Word . . ." prologue. Then very rapidly,² John the Baptizer baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River and declares him to be the Lamb of God. Then, Jesus invites two men to "come and see," Andrew and his brother, Simon Peter. Both become disciples of Jesus.³

The "next day," Jesus heads for Galilee, where he tells Philip to "follow me." Philip's hometown was that of Andrew and Peter, Bethsaida⁴, though Peter was living in Capernaum at the time of Jesus' public ministry. Philip then approaches a friend,

"Son of Man"

In today's reading from John's gospel, Nathanael is astounded that Jesus saw him praying under a fig tree when Jesus was no where around. But Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see "far greater things than these . . . you will see the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (John 1:51). Using powerful imagery from the story of Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:10-22) and from Daniel 7, Jesus tells Nathanael all that he needs to know to grasp what he will soon see and hear and experience as Jesus' disciple.

Because we proclaim Jesus to be fully God and fully human, it is understandable that we often take "Son of Man" to be a statement about Jesus' humanity, making "Son of God" a statement about Jesus' divinity. But "Son of Man" is not a cryptic way of saying that Jesus is human. Rather, it is a powerful image drawn from Daniel 7:13-14.

The book of Daniel was very popular and influential in Jesus' day, for good reason. Daniel is about the faithfulness of God toward those who remain faithful to God in the face of intimidation and threats. Daniel is set in Babylon during the exile. Daniel and his friends refuse to accommodate their faith in the LORD God to the culture and religion of the Babylonians. They stay resolute. Through God's intervention, Daniel's friends are rescued from the fiery furnace and Daniel isn't eaten by lions after being tossed in their den.

The Romans were the "Babylonians" of first-century Judea. It was Roman soldiers who stood guard over the temple during the big Jewish festivals. It was Roman governors who desecrated the temple from time to time.

Daniel 7 opens with dramatic images of all those who threaten Israel. These opponents are monsters rising up from the sea of chaos. But in v. 13-14, we meet the "Son of Man" (regrettably translated "one like a human being" in the NRSV). This Son of Man is Israel's rescuer and vindicator. The Son of Man comes before the Ancient One (God) to be given dominion over all creation. By referring to himself as the Son of Man, Jesus reveals that he is Israel's rescuer and that he is Lord.

Nathanael, telling him that he's found the one long promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. Of course, when Philip says that "the one" is from Nazareth, Nathanael scoffs. How could the great Messiah come from a dump like Nazareth?! But Andrew persists, telling Nathanael to just "come and see." And when Nathanael meets Jesus, he proclaims Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, though he doesn't grasp Jesus' full identity. Still, Nathanael enthusiastically responds to the invitation.

Inviting: Come and see

Perhaps God's challenge to us to invite is as simple as Andrew's "come and see." Andrew doesn't pass out tracts or stand on street corners. He doesn't grab folks by the collar and drag them into some place they'd rather not be. Instead, he simply tells his friend what Jesus told him, "Come and see." Andrew is confident that Nathanael's encounter with Jesus will be as profound and life-changing as his own. Just a simple "come and see."

Of course, one might ask, what is it that people are invited to "come and see" now. It's not as if Jesus of Nazareth is standing in the Narthex waiting to greet visitors. But in a sense, he can be.

John the Baptizer testified to the light, that is, to Jesus, the "true light that enlightens the world" (John 1:7-8). When Jesus tells his disciples, "You are the light of the world," he means that the light of Christ is to shine through his disciples, through you and me. Those we invite to "come and see" are to see Jesus in each of us. So we invite and we welcome and we greet and we embrace, as we proclaim the Good News to all those who come to hear.

²The events in the first chapter move forward from "the next day" to "the next day" to "the next day."

³"Disciple" can be an intimidating word for some. But all it really conveys is the idea of an apprenticeship. Disciples of Jesus are those who are actively striving to be like Jesus, to be more Christlike. Can a person be a believer but not a disciple? I guess so, at least for awhile. Can a person grow in his or her faith without being a disciple? I think not. What does God want from us? To be disciples and to make more disciples. It is God's job to save souls. Our work is to cultivate more and more apprentices of the Master.

⁴Bethsaida was a town on the northeastern shore of Galilee, while Capernaum was on the northwestern shore.

Being the Light – Extending the Invitation

We know we are to be the light to the world but we are often unsure as to how to go about it! Sometimes we think it means we have to pull people out of their homes or stand on street corners passing out tracts. Sure, we ought to invite our neighbors to church with us and share the Good News with strangers, but the biblical understanding of invitation, of being the light to the world, extends to every part of our lives. We invite when we worship, when we learn, when we love, when we care, when we serve, when we work, when we play – every part of our life is to be an invitation and a witness to others.

Let me give you one example. We often don't think of our own worship as an act of evangelism or invitation. But, when a person who is not a churchgoer visits our worship service, they are looking for three things. They want to feel the presence of God. They want to see the Christian church living out its faith – kindness, love, patience, service to others, and so on. Finally, they want to see the relevance of the faith for their lives.¹ Every Sunday, each of us, as a member of the St. Andrew community, is an important witness to the reality of Christ's love and invitation to all persons. Just as sports heroes are unavoidably role models for our youth, we are always, in all times, and in all places, witnesses to the living reality and glory of Christ's sacrificial love.

Peter understood this when he wrote to Christians suffering for their faith, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles² to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge" (1 Peter 2:11-12). Paul understood this when he wrote to the troubled church in Corinth, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1). Paul calls us to imitate Christ in all we do so that the glory of God will be visible to all and that all will be saved.

So what does it mean to be the light to the world? It means that we are to lift Jesus up for all the world to see, so that all the world might be drawn to him, enabling all the world to see his saving love. Because Jesus announced and inaugurated the arrival of God's kingdom, we live in the "bright interval"³ between Easter and the final, great consummation of the story, the renewal of all creation and the "new heaven and new earth" (Rev 21:1) The early Christians found great joy because they understood that they lived not in the last days but in the first days of a new age! We live in such days as well and we should find such joy, a joy that will shine for all to see, drawing them in, inviting them to join us in the community of God's servant people!!

1. This is from the survey and focus group research of George Barna.

2. For more on the "alien" status of Christians, see *Resident Aliens*, by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, 1989, Abingdon Press. They offer a challenging vision of what it means to be a Christian community.

3. from N. T. Wright. *The Challenge of Jesus*. 1999. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press

READING WITH HEART & MIND, JAN 7 – JAN 12

This week's readings tell us more about God's call for his people to be inviting, for all the world's people are summoned to the worship of the one true God. How do these passages inform our understanding of the first holy habit? In what new directions are we pointed as we seek to invite others to meet Jesus?

Monday, Isaiah 2:2-4 Out of Jerusalem will come the word of the Lord.

Tuesday, Isaiah 42:5-6 & 49:6 Israel (the people of God) is to be the light to the world.

Wednesday, Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission.

Thursday, Acts 2 The Day of Pentecost and the growth of the first church in Jerusalem

Friday, Acts 10 The conversion of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion; Paul invites Gentiles into the family of God

Saturday, Ephesians 5:6-20 We are children of the light and we are to live accordingly.

Sermon Notes

Winter Bible Academy starts in a week!!

Classes begin the week of January 13.

To register go to www.thebibleacademy.com

We've got another great class line-up including the enormously popular *Alpha* class on marriage, as well as the *Alpha* introduction to religion and faith. We have a Sunday morning class with Rev. Doug Meyer on holy habits. We're also offering two one-day Saturday workshops: Rev. Michael Reeves will be teaching us *How to Study the Bible* and Laura Zuber will repeat her workshop on spiritual gifts. Scott Engle will be teaching classes on Jesus and on David. Frankey Commer is leading a class on Methodism. Bob Pannell's class is on the psalms. Laura Zuber is also leading a daytime class on Jesus' "I Am" sayings. You can see that there is the usual offering of diverse, interesting, and meaningful classes. Childcare will be provided.

Starting This Sunday! *Exploring World Religions*

Taught by Scott Engle at 11:00 in Festival Hall on Sunday morning

This series will be an introduction to the major world religions – but with a twist! We'll begin with an introduction to Christianity and then, with humility and respect, we'll look at some of the basics of other religions and see how they differ from Christianity. Our goal will not be to become "experts" in these religions, but to understand our faith better by understanding what Christianity is not. We may even learn how to speak more confidently about our faith to friends and loved ones who are not Christian.

Join us any week that you can, as each week will stand on it own.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What have been your own experiences with New Year's resolutions? Have you ever made any about your faith and discipleship? How might we do a better job of keeping the resolutions we make around the seven holy habits?
2. Were you ever invited to meet Jesus, to "come and see" for yourself? If so, how would you describe your experience? How did you first get to St. Andrew? Were you invited? By whom and how? How did you feel when you were invited? Have you ever invited someone to come with you to St. Andrew? You might share some of the inviting stories. What are some of the various ways we invite? How could we all become better inviters?
3. Take a few moments and read Jesus' parable of the great dinner in Luke 14:15-25. In the parable, who is the host for the dinner? Who are the invited guests? Why might all these people have made excuses for not coming to the dinner? Does the host invite them again? What do you think of the host's idea to invite the needy?! Why do you think Jesus told this parable? What point is he trying to make? Why did he use a parable to make his point? Whom does God invite to his banquet? To what sort of life does he invite them? Is there an RSVP? How should we explain this invitation to others? What is involved in our acceptance of the invitation?