

2 Epiphany A 2011

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Some of us choose our stories.  
Sometimes, a story is given to us.

This gospel story,  
In which Andrew and another person –  
Who could be you or me or any of us –  
This story where Andrew and another  
Follow Jesus,  
Is our story.

It was given to us  
By people we do not know,  
For reasons we may never discover.

All we know is that about a hundred years ago,  
The men and women who had built this church  
Changed its name.  
Once we became St. Andrew's,  
Andrew became our patron,  
And his story of seeking and finding  
The Christ  
Became our story.

For several months now,  
The leaders of this parish,  
The vestry and clergy and staff,  
Have been working with this story  
As we look and listen  
For a way to clarify our vision  
for this community.

We have talked about ourselves as seekers,  
And we have focused on the question of Jesus,  
What are you looking for?

We have talked about ourselves as welcoming,  
And looked at the invitation of Jesus,  
Come and see.  
And we have looked at the bold proclamation of Andrew,  
We have found the Christ.  
And there we have remained.

How is this story our story?  
What does Andrew the finder offer  
To this community of seekers?

Does he offer a challenge,  
Or an invitation?  
Does he inspire us?  
What happens within and among us  
When we hear him say,  
We have found the Christ,  
And wonder about taking those words  
As our own?

Stories unfold slowly.  
We hear one word first,  
Or one phrase,  
Or one image comes alive,  
Or we connect with one event.  
Later on another layer of meaning opens up,  
The sequence of events becomes more clear.

And maybe, as the story unfolds  
the gift of a new question  
Brings fresh insight.

There is a question  
At the center of this story,

And we almost always miss it.

That's easy to understand.

It's very hard for us to hear the question,

Reading this story in translation.

But even if we read it

In the original,

Our ears might not be tuned to hear it.

You have to stay in this story for a long time

Before this question

Lets itself be known.

Jesus asks Andrew and his companion,

What are you looking for?

And they respond with another question,

Teacher, where are you staying?

Where are you staying?

Today, when I hear this gospel,

I hear this question at its very heart.

Where are you staying?

Where is your dwelling?

Where do you abide?

Where will you remain?

If I gave you a copy of John's gospel

And a pen in the color of your choice,

I would then ask you to mark in some way

These passages:

John the Baptist sees the Holy Spirit

Descend on Jesus like a dove,

And *remain* there.

Andrew asks Jesus,

Where are you *staying*?

They come and see where he is *staying*,

And they *remain* with him.

Then, unless we wanted to spend all day on this exercise –  
And I'm not saying it wouldn't be worthwhile –  
I would ask you to move on to the center of the gospel,  
To the last meal Jesus shares with his friends,  
And turn to the place where he says,  
*Abide* in me, as I in you.

I am the vine;  
you are the branches.  
If you *abide* in me,  
you will bear much fruit.

And then, if just for a moment  
We went back to look at the witness of Hebrew scripture,  
We might find something like this,  
God,  
I love the place where your glory *abides*.

This is all the same word.  
Staying,  
Remaining,  
abiding,  
dwelling.

These words take time  
to root down into our souls.  
We are always on the move.  
Staying still,  
remaining in the now,  
take discipline for us.

It's easy to dismiss Andrew's question,  
and fast forward  
to the invitation, come and see.  
But the question,  
Where are you staying,

Andrew's question,  
becomes,  
if we can stop and listen to it,  
a question  
that says everything  
about who Jesus is,  
and how we can connect with him,  
and how that might change us,  
and our world.

What might it mean to see where Jesus is staying,  
and remain with him there?

What does staying,  
remaining,  
abiding really mean?

The insight of at least one John scholar  
Is that this is the way  
John's gospel speaks of prayer.

That indwelling, abiding,  
Remaining together,  
The communion of souls  
Who live together in friendship and love –  
That's the heart of prayer.

And that is where we are called to be right now –  
Or so I believe.

This is how Andrew's story  
Becomes our story,  
When we learn,  
With him, to abide.

Before he went out,  
found his brother,  
and made his bold statement,

We have found the Christ,  
Andrew learned to remain with Jesus –  
Jesus, the one in whom God's glory abides.

He learned, or began to learn,  
or at least caught a glimpse of the longing to learn,  
how to abide in Jesus,  
as Jesus longed to abide in him.  
Only when Andrew began to stay with him  
Could he find the truth –  
In coming to stay with Jesus  
He had found the place  
Where God's glory abides.

How did that happen?  
How might it happen now?  
How does the human spirit open up,  
so that there is room inside it  
for the one in whom all the fullness of God  
is pleased to dwell?

There are many ways.  
For some it happens through music.  
For some it happens in the meditation time  
at the end of a yoga practice.  
For some it happens running, or swimming.  
For some it happens in centering prayer,  
and for others in handing out socks and towels  
to the homeless, or doing their laundry.

All these are ways of prayer.  
And Jesus dwells in all of them,  
and remains with us there.

When we abide in him,  
He comes to live in us,  
And then, when we look into our own souls,  
We find him there.

When we abide in him in many ways of prayer,  
and he in us,  
then we will be ready,  
as Andrew was ready,  
first to ask the question, and then  
to discover the indwelling glory  
and then to tell the good news.

For Andrew, prayer was the way  
From seeking to finding.

And perhaps not for Andrew only.  
Remember –  
There is another with him.  
You, me, any of us –  
All of us.  
This is our story  
If we choose.