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Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Your Welcome*

Romans 15:7; John 1:40-42; 6:5-9; 12:20-22

Before I give my message, I'd like to give you some good news. Would you like some incredibly good news? In case you are new to us, we are in the middle of a 36-month initiative called Beyond These Walls. Our goal was to eliminate all our debt so that we could move beyond the walls of this church as never before. In June 2017, we had debt of \$ 5.4 million. As of today, your gifts have paid off...wait for it... (WAIT ON SLIDE!!!!) \$2,754,000! We have crossed the half-way point! Six months ahead of schedule! Isn't that wonderful? I am so proud of you! On St. Andrews weekend when we celebrate the legacy handed down to us, we are creating our OWN legacy. In 18 months, we will pay off the last dime of debt...a legacy of sacrifice that will allow future generations to move beyond these walls as never before. Praise the Lord! PRAY.

St. Andrew was one of the Jesus' twelve disciples. If you are a golfer, you know that the Scottish town named after him is the home of golf. But it was also the home of Presbyterianism; did you know that? So, if you are a golfing Presbyterian, it's a perfect place to do your PhD. Which I did. The town got its name because an ancient monk deposited some of Andrew's bones there for safe-keeping: a kneecap, an arm bone, three fingers and a tooth. They built a huge cathedral to house those relics. St. Andrew was so important to Scotland that their flag is Andrew's cross, so named because he was crucified on an "X" shaped cross. So...lots of traditions surrounding Andrew.

But the Bible really doesn't tell us that much about him. He was Simon Peter's brother and he was a fisherman. Were it not for the gospel-writer John, that's all we know for sure. But John gives three tiny episodes from Andrew's life. We will look at all three this evening/morning...and see if you can pick up a common theme, ok?

The first story comes in John 1. John the Baptist has several disciples, including Andrew, but when John sees Jesus, he points him out and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God." At that, Andrew and one another began to follow Jesus. Listen to verse 41: "[Andrew] first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah'...He brought him to Jesus."

The second story comes in John 6. Jesus is teaching a crowd of thousands on a hillside in Galilee. Hours passed and he grew concerned because they were hungry. He asked his disciples to get food for the people. We hear from Andrew a second time: "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?'"

The third story comes from John 12:20. Jesus is in Jerusalem for Passover. "Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus." (This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.)

It must have been tough living in the shadow of a brother like Simon Peter. Peter sucked the air out of the room. He always had something to say. He was always in the spotlight... sometimes for good; sometimes not so good. Andrew, by contrast, is less conspicuous! He doesn't stand out like brother Simon.

But there IS one thing Andrew was good at...and it comes out in all three of our stories. In every instance, Andrew brings someone to Jesus. In John 1, before he accepts Jesus' invitation to come hang out, Andrew "FIRST found his brother...and brought him to Jesus." When the disciples are faced with the impossible task of feeding thousands of people in the middle of nowhere, Andrew notices a little boy with a ridiculously small lunch ...and brings him to Jesus. And when a group of Greek tourists want to meet Jesus, they ask Philip who asks Andrew who takes them to Jesus. Andrew was always welcoming folks into Jesus' presence.

This evening/morning we begin a series entitled Your Welcome. And the spelling is intentional. I want to ask a potentially irksome question of you: how is YOUR welcome? Hospitality was an important value in the early church. How about today? If you were to grade yourself on YOUR hospitality as a follower of Jesus, what would you give? Jonah set us up for this conversation. Jonah was perfectly happy to be a prophet to his own people. But when God called him to reach out to outsiders...especially yucky outsiders like the Ninevites...he wanted nothing to do with it.

How about you? I'm not even talking about welcoming YOUR Ninevites...the brutes in your life. I'm talking about welcoming your neighbor or your workmate or your school mate...or even welcoming the person new to our church who tried to sit down in the pew you were saving for someone else! How is your welcome? What would it look like if Chapel Hill was known as the most welcoming church in town?

You might have noticed hospitality has been a focus in recent months. We've encouraged you to greet someone you don't know; we've asked you to move into the center of a pew so that latecomers don't have to crawl over the top of you; we've begged you not to save seats; we've warmed up our foyer with inviting furniture; we've even handed out mugs to first-time guests and called them to thank them for joining us.

We've been working at being more welcoming. Many of you HAVE noticed. And frankly, some of you are irked by it. We've heard comments like, "Why are we focusing so much on hospitality?" Here's my answer: Because we are NOT nearly as good at it as we think we are! In fact, most churches aren't. A nationwide survey asked church members if theirs was a friendly church. 97% of respondents said their church was friendly. The same survey asked guests to those same churches the same question. Guess what their response was? 3%! Only three percent of guests felt like churches were friendly. 97% of members say YES. 97% of guests say NO!

What does that suggest? That we ARE friendly...with each other! We love each other. We enjoy talking with each other. We value our relationships with each other. And in the process we... unintentionally, I am sure...exclude or ignore our guests.

You wouldn't do that at home! If a guest came to the front door of your home, you wouldn't think of opening the door, letting them in, and then going back to whatever you were doing. You'd welcome them in, take their coat, invite them to sit down, get them something to drink and focus on them. That's how you treat guests. I realize that we North-westerners aren't as good at this as our Southern friends...but we still have THIS much figured out, right?

But we forget these basic courtesies when we come to church. Instead of thinking of ourselves as "hosts," we see ourselves as customers...which means that we are more interested in our comfort and fulfillment than we are insuring that our guests feel welcomed and have a profound experience with God and his people.

Andrew was a natural. He was MORE interested in helping others meet Jesus than himself. In fact, in our first story, before he went to hang out with Jesus, he "FIRST" (that's the word) FIRST went to find his brother Peter. Andrew was good at bringing people to Jesus...like Simon and the Greeks...and he was good at noticing those who were already near Jesus...and drawing them closer. Like that little boy with a lunch.

So...on this St. Andrews weekend...I want to ask this simple question: When was the last time you invited someone to church? Or when was the last time you welcomed a stranger who HAD already come to your church? When did you last say, "I'm not sure if you have a church home but if you don't, I'd love to take you to Chapel Hill." Or say to the stranger standing in the foyer with a deer-in-the-headlight look on his face, "I'm not sure I have met you. My name is Mark. What is your name?" Or "Could I walk you down to our nursery?" or "Would you like to sit here with us? There's room." Or "Could I buy you a coffee in Hebrews; I'd like to hear your story."

I realize practicing hospitality can be disruptive and distracting. It takes us out of our rhythm; out of our comfort zone. It might even get you in trouble. Friday, I was so wrapped up in a conversation with someone over breakfast, that it wasn't until I got home that I realized: I didn't pay my bill! I dined and dashed! And when I came back and told them what had happened, the girl said, "Pastor Mark?" Maybe I was TOO hospitable!

But if we are not willing to disrupt or inconvenience ourselves a little bit, we will never be an Andrew. And we NEED to be more welcoming because, honestly my Sweetheart Church, we are not as good at it as we think we are. We are GREAT with each other. We could do better with our guests.

SO...what holds us back? Assuming you want to be better at this....and I realize that's not true for everyone. (And if not, you'll have to work that one out with the Lord.) But what keeps us from being more welcoming? I put together a list of obstacles to hospitality. See if you can spot YOUR obstacle! We may not be Andrews because we are Fearful, Feckless, Forgetful, Friendless, or Fake.

Fearful-We are afraid that people might think we are a religious nut, or that people might reject us or that we might get in trouble at work or that we might not have the right answers or that we might fail. Is it fear that holds you back?

Feckless- (That mean's lazy...but I had to use the f-word.) We INTEND to invite our friend...we INTEND to sit in a different pew or reach out to a person we do not know or invite someone to coffee...but we are just too lazy to actually do anything about it.

We talk a good game, but never actually do anything! Are you feckless?

Forgetful- This happens to veteran Christians. We FORGET how wonderful it was to meet Jesus, when we first discovered he had forgiven our sins and wanted a relationship with us. We forget how wonderful that was! It's like a neglectful spouse who forgets how madly in love he once was with his bride. Our love grows stale...and because we aren't as excited about Jesus as we once were, we are ho hum about inviting someone ELSE to get closer to him. Have you forgotten your first love for the Lord?

Friendless-One of the problems of being a Christian and church-person is that pretty soon, you don't have any friends that AREN'T Christians and church people. This is MY problem! I don't have that many relationships with folks who aren't already Chapel Hillbillies. Do you have any unchurched or de-churched friends?

The final obstacle might seem harsh: Fake- If we CLAIM to be a follower of Jesus, CLAIM to be an active member of his church...but really aren't... if we are spiritually phony, we won't invite someone into a closer relationship with Jesus that we ourselves don't have.

If you aren't an Andrew. If you can't recall the last time you invited someone to church...or reached out to a stranger IN church...maybe one of these F-bombs is your reason: Fearful, Feckless, Forgetful, Friendless or Fake. And here's the deal...if you are content with the way you are; if you are like the country club member

who doesn't WANT new members in the club because they steal your favorite tee time...then you may have no interest in changing.

But if you WANT to be a better Andrew...a better inviter... a better welcomer...there are things you can do. First, pray and ask God to fix your problem. If you are fearful, pray for courage. If you are feckless, pray for discipline. If you are forgetful, pray for spiritual revival. If you are friendless, pray for new relationships. And if you are fake, pray for Jesus to REALLY become the Lord of your life.

And then...after you've prayed...do something about it! One thing you could do would be to promise that, over the next 5 weeks, you will invite one person to come to church. How many would commit to that? And here's the second: I want hundreds of Guerilla Greeters. Members who say, "For the next five weeks, I am going to be an intentional host. I'm going to keep my eyes open. I'm going to sit in a different place or I am going to approach a stranger after church or I am going to buy someone a coffee or I am going to actually smile at someone on the way in from the parking lot instead of scowling all the way to the door." In other words, Guerilla Greeters would say, "This is MY house. I am the host. I am going to look for my guests...and bring them just a little closer to Jesus." How many promise to be Guerilla Greeters for the next five weeks?"

Terrific. Now you might forget. But we will remind you. And guests...I REALLY hope you don't feel like you have a target on your back...or your front! But getting closer to Jesus and his Church is the most important thing that ever happened to most of us...and we would love to help you do that, too!

One of our sacred St. Andrews traditions is to scroll through the names of every Chapel Hill member who has gone to be with the Lord. These are our church parents who came before us, made a place for us, welcomed us and nurtured us and invited us into faith and service. May their legacy of faith and faithfulness inspire US to do our part, to reach out, to draw others in to discover what has become so precious to us.