

One of my favorite moments each year at Annual Conference happens during the service of the ordering of ministry. This is the moment that pastors are licensed, commissioned, and ordained by the Bishop and these moments are important as people who have been working for many years to become pastors finally find themselves living into these roles.

But the most impactful part of the service happens at the end when the bishop issues a call to all who are in attendance. She says I now invite anyone who feels called to ministry and mission to come forward and receive prayer.

Music starts playing and at first no one walks to the front of the room. Then one by one people start coming. People start off coming alone, but then start coming in groups together. People come who are young and old and even children walk up to the front to pray with the Bishop. It is a very moving service as the Holy Spirit moves through all who are there.

Twenty years ago, I found myself in one of these services knowing I was called to be a pastor, but not yet ready to let others know. Then all of a sudden, my friend Linda pulled me out of my row and said: “Jessie it’s time to go.”

I knew what she meant so I followed her and hand in hand we walked toward the Bishop. I knew that this was another pivotal moment for me in my journey to the ministry. It was my moment of public declaration that I had been called to ministry and that I was going to do something about it. I saw knowing smiles as I walked down the long aisle to the bishop, some people I knew even had tears in their eyes as this was a moment of confirmation for them that I had been called.

I share with you this important story in my life because sometimes it takes other people in our lives to help us answer God’s calling. God has given us the gift of the church as together we are called to make disciples for the glory of God.

All throughout the Bible we see God inviting us into a relationship. In the Old Testament we read the incredible call narratives of Moses, Jacob, Jeremiah and Isaiah, people whom God called to be leaders and prophets to lead God’s people and to speak the word of the Lord to those who would listen.

In the Old Testament we see that this calling usually happens when the person is alone and then they respond with a phrase like “Here I am send me.” In the New Testament, we see this dynamic change. Instead of people being called individually, we see people starting to be called in community to be disciples of Christ.

In our Scripture for today from John 1 we see that John the Baptist is testifying to Jesus’ identity of the Son of God. Now John was not necessarily saying anything he hadn’t said before. Commentary tells us that the difference in this passage is that people actually responded to his testimony.¹ Maybe its because they were there to witness Jesus’ baptism where they heard the voice of God and saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove.

Jesus’ baptism greatly impacted John the Baptist and gave him even more passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ. As John stood there one day telling anyone who would listen about Jesus, two of his disciples took notice and wanted to know more.

So, they followed Jesus and he turned to them and said: “What are you looking for?” They wanted to know where he was staying to which Jesus says, “Come and see.”

This was not simply an invitation to see the accommodations of Jesus Christ, but a call to discipleship. Then the most amazing thing happened, they listened to Jesus’ invitation and followed him.

Each and every day Christ calls us to come and see the ministry to which we have been called to do. But sometimes we do not heed Christ’s invitation. Sometimes we say, “Maybe later,” or “I don’t feel like traveling today Lord.”

Sometimes we get distracted by the division in the church or the sad events in the world and we stop looking for Jesus Christ. Yet, Christ continues to invite us to lives of service.

These two disciples who accepted Jesus’ invitation became instrumental to the church’s survival after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You see the two people that Jesus was talking to were the brothers Andrew and Peter. Just as John the Baptist bore a faithful witness to Jesus Christ, we see that it was Andrew who confirmed for his brother the identity of Christ. He said, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1: 41b).

Andrew invited his brother to come and see the Messiah. God used Andrew to help his brother believe in Jesus Christ and his ministry of salvation.

I have often wondered would Peter have lived a completely different life if his brother had not invited him to believe in Jesus Christ the Messiah?

Would I have had the courage to answer the Bishop’s call if Linda had not invited me?

God calls every one of us to help other people come to know Jesus Christ. We too are tasked with the Great Commission in Matthew 28 to “make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Discipleship and evangelism are all about invitation. Christ invites, we respond, and we invite others to know Jesus Christ.

As we start another year together, I would like our number one goal to be making disciples of Jesus Christ together. We do this through spiritual formation and outreach. In order to share with others about Jesus we must have a personal relationship with Him. We get to know Christ more through reading the Bible.

All throughout Scripture Jesus is known by many names. Here in John’s gospel we hear Jesus called “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). To understand the significance of this name we back go to the first Passover in Exodus. Here the Israelites were instructed to take the blood of the slaughtered paschal lamb and put it on their doorpost so the Lord would pass over and strike down the Egyptians (Exodus 12).

The blood of the lamb saved them. Here in John we see Jesus is the lamb of the God, the one who has come to save us by taking on the sins of the world.

Understanding this connection is helpful as we explain God to others and how throughout the Bible God has been saving God’s people. First God the Father saved the Israelites, then God the Son came and took upon himself the sins of the world on the cross, and the Holy Spirit continues to draw us to know and understand God’s saving action on our lives.

Studying the Bible together helps us grow in our discipleship because it teaches us to recognize Christ and Christ’s ministry in the world. Reading the Bible gives us further insight into who God is and how God is calling us to live. Here on the Rappahannock Charge we have had more than one ongoing study throughout the year. We always have Lenten and Advent Studies and this week we are starting our study on Revelation. I hope that you will join in with one of our studies or take one of the Upper Rooms each month.

It is not enough to understand who God is, we are then called to live out our faith. John Wesley called this “social holiness” and it is how we live our faith out loud.

We see this movement to social holiness from the disciples. First, they came to understand Jesus as the Son of God, then they lived out Christ’s ministry of grace. We practice social holiness when we remember that we belong to one another because we belong to God. Just this last week I was reminded of the power of the family of God.

As we were getting ready for Rosie’s funeral, the family requested a potluck lunch. We brought a couple things and hoped for the best. By the time the reception started the table was overflowing with food. This reminded me that we can do more when we work together, and we all desire to share Christ’s love with others.

My hope for us this year as the Rappahannock Charge is that we decide upon an outreach project in the Rappahanock community that all three of our churches can do together. While each church can keep their own unique outreach events, I want us to vision together an additional way that we can all help the people of Rappahannock County come to know God’s grace. We do this through relationships.

Relationships are really what discipleship is all about anyway. It is about growing in our relationship with God and other people. How can we grow in relationship with those in need in Rappahannock County?

Who are the least of these in our community? How can we help embody God’s grace and invite others to come and see the living God?

At each church council meeting over the next two months I will be taking your ideas on what we can do in the community as our focused outreach for this year. I hope by next month I will have a proposal for us to try.

To be in relationship with others, like Andrew and Peter, we must be open to following wherever Jesus leads us. I am sure Andrew and Peter never could have imagined themselves to be practicing ministry alongside Jesus Christ. They found themselves among the poor and rich, with those in power and with those who had none. After the death and resurrection of Jesus history tells us that both these disciples of Christ continued to passionately preach the good news of the Gospel.

Church historian Eusebuis wrote that Andrew “may have brought the gospel to as far away as Kiev which is now part of Ukraine.”ⁱⁱ

On the day of Pentecost it was the disciple Peter who preached the good news to which over 3,000 people responded and were baptized.

Both of these disciples went on to do amazing things for the glory of God all because they accepted Christ’s invitation to come and see.

God has invited us to come and see. To come and see Christ at work in our lives and in Rappahannock County. To come and see who we are called to invite to know Christ. To come and see all that God has in store for us.

The good news is that Christ will continue to invite us to participate in His ministry of grace.

May we accept Christ’s invitation and invite others as well. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ New Interpreters Commentary of the Bible. Vol. IX. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995. P. 540

ⁱⁱ <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/the-apostle-andrew-biography-life-and-death/>