

**2nd Sunday of after the Epiphany (Year A) – John 1:29-42**  
**St Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ**

***Come and See!***

Often when people meet me they want to know what my background is. Over the years, I've grown accustomed to people wondering about my mixed-race ancestry, which is Chinese and Anglo. But when I'm around church people they want to know my denominational history. Yes, I'm a cradle Episcopalian, but my parents were not. My father was raised Baptist, was received into the Episcopal Church while in college, and was later ordained to the priesthood. My mother grew up in Hawaii when it was still a territory and was encouraged to assimilate to an increasingly Anglicized culture.

I used to think that missionaries had a negative impact on indigenous peoples. But over time I've learned that history is complex, and is shaped by multiple perspectives and experiences. I remember going to the movies with my parents to see James Michener's *Hawaii* on the big screen. His movie conveyed a particular narrative of how Christianity spread throughout the islands. When my daughter and I visited Iolani Palace a few decades later, we heard another perspective on colonialism and its interconnectedness with Christian missionary societies. But about thirty years ago, I gained a more personal point of view when I received an unexpected letter from my mother. It was a very thick letter, written in her beautifully precise school-teacher

handwriting. The contents of the letter conveyed my mother's spiritual autobiography; how she became Christian and Episcopalian. She recalled growing up Buddhist and not understanding all the rituals. Some of the sounds and scents scared her. My grandmother attentively listened to my mother's concerns and encouraged her to explore other religions.

One day while my mom was hanging out at the Ben Franklin Five & Dime store, a local priest approached her and invited her to "Come and See" the Episcopal Church. She decided to accept the invitation and was warmly welcomed by the priest and parishioners, especially the other children. Eventually my mom was invited to assist the priest by setting out his vestments before the service. Later, when she transferred from the University of Hawaii to the University of Michigan, my mom stayed involved with The Episcopal Church through Canterbury House, where my father served as Chaplain. Following her graduation from U of M, my parents were married at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor. I was born a few years later, but that's a story for another time.

My mother's story is deeply personal, yet one that reflects the gracious hospitality practices of Mary Parmer: Invite-Welcome-Connect. They are the same hospitality practices that we heard about in today's Gospel reading. When Jesus meets a couple of John's disciples, he is cordial and kind. He invites them to come and see what he's up to. Jesus invites them into a new

relationship. One of the first people that Jesus meets is Andrew, one of John's disciples. Andrew is sometimes referred to as the first missionary in the company of disciples. He became interested in following Jesus primarily because of what John said. John testified that Jesus was a person who was worthy to be followed because he was closely connected with God. But Andrew was so amazed when he met Jesus that he immediately went to tell his brother, Simon Peter. When they asked Jesus, "Where are you staying?" he responded, "Come and See." And they did. They didn't hesitate to find out more about who Jesus was, why he was there, and what their roles might be in sharing the good news.

Over the past several months I've had the honor of being invited by you to "Come and See" St. Andrew's -- to find out how Jesus is working in our lives, and explore how we might share the good news together in mutual ministry. As many of you know, your rector search process included answering written questions, engaging in a Skype video and phone calls, and finally coming to visit St. Andrew's and Sedona in person for several days. I found the process to be prayerful, thoughtful, and thorough. But even before I started participating in your search process, I recall being very impressed by the good work that you engaged in with Canon Megan in preparing the Parish Profile. You discussed many things with her and each other related to the same question that Jesus had for the first disciples: "What are you looking for?" In

exploring that question, you discussed the importance of faithfulness to God through worship, outreach, stewardship, and pastoral care. And you were seeking possibilities for new life in our shared ministries in the church and wider community. But perhaps the more important question all of us considered was the one posed by Andrew and the other disciple: “Where are you staying?” A more accurate translation of that question is, “Where are you abiding?”

Sometimes we think that places where we abide might feel safe and comfortable, such as our homes. But in the context of today’s Gospel narrative, abide refers to the deep relationship that connects Jesus with God, and us with Jesus. Certainly we think about abiding with God in our hearts and minds in loving and caring ways. But abiding with Jesus doesn’t always involve warm and fuzzy feelings. Abiding with Jesus can be challenging, risky, and costly.

We are abiding with Jesus whenever we feed the hungry, aid the poor, or clothe the naked.

We are abiding with Jesus whenever we speak up on behalf of the marginalized, become allies with the disenfranchised, and collaborate for peace and justice.

We are abiding with Jesus whenever we help someone find safe haven from an abusive relationship; whenever we accompany a friend through a

medical procedure or serious illness; whenever we share the pain of losing a loved one.

We are abiding with Jesus when we meet people wherever they are on their spiritual journeys, and encourage each other to “Come and See” what God is doing with us, and for us and through us in surprisingly transformative and life-changing ways.

As baptized Christians, all of us are called to be missionaries; we are all called to participate in God’s mission of loving one another as Christ loves us. And now more than ever, we are all called to be a missional church. Yes, we still should be an attractational church by inviting and attracting people to participate in our beautiful liturgies, our fun youth activities, and our seasonal shindigs. But we should continue to explore ways to be a missional church in our neighborhoods, our communities, and our world. Over the years, St. Andrew’s has established many wonderful missional ministries in the Verde Valley and across the Diocese of Arizona. But we must continue to look for how Jesus is already walking ahead of us and inviting us to participate in his mission and ministry in new ways.

I am extremely grateful to all of you for inviting me to “Come & See” how God is showing up in your lives. And I am excited to be participating with St. Andrew’s in carrying out Christ’s mission of love for all people.

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