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St. Andrew's Day – December 4, 2016

Happy St. Andrew's Day! Today, we have the classic story about call - Jesus calling his first disciples, Peter and his brother, our patron Andrew.

While reflecting on the readings this week, I've been remembering stories people have shared with me over the years about their own compelling calls. And, if we try to imagine Andrew and his brother Peter, so compelled by Jesus' call, that they had to drop everything and follow him, perhaps we can recall times in our lives when we've felt so moved - by a person, or a place, or an idea - that we've had no choice but to follow. Some of the many remarkable stories I've heard over the years include someone moved by the assassination of President Kennedy to leave school and join the Peace Corps. And, the many experiences parishioners have shared of coming to this region for a visit, and finding themselves so captivated by Southern Arizona that they bought a house and moved here. Or a young couple so distressed by the treatment of migrants by officials that they helped set up a shelter in Tucson for newly released detainees. We all have stories of answering a compelling call.

But, what all our stories, and those from the Gospel seem to gloss over is what happens after the call. For example, second-thoughts and regrets. We have all had them – in the sobering light of day, we wonder what we might have gotten ourselves into. Once the initial excitement of the adventure has worn away, we're hit by the realities of change. What keeps people moving forward even when beset by doubt and fear? I have to believe the apostles had their share of regrets, and we know they encountered many obstacles. In the initial excitement of following Jesus, they imagined there would be glory in overthrowing the Roman rule, or maybe positions of favor in God's heavenly Kingdom. Whatever dreams or expectations they might have had, at some point they must have realized they were sorely mistaken. Perhaps when they saw Jesus consorting with the poor and the crippled; or the wealthy and powerful;

as well as his open criticism of authority and his flagrant disregard of convention - these all must have caused many of Jesus' followers to question their decision to follow. The Gospel is mostly silent on the disciples who chose not to continue with Jesus. They quietly or maybe even angrily left and went back to the relative safety and familiarity of their lives.

But I wonder about Andrew, and the others who chose to stick with Jesus, what made them continue? They followed Jesus, even after it was clear to them that his mission was filled with danger – Sure, Peter, in his fear and anguish, denied knowing Jesus three times. Others did as well, I'm sure. But they stayed, and even remained together after Jesus was dead and buried. What sustained them? Could the love of God that Jesus showed them been so intense that they had enough confidence to follow him, even through those terrifying hours leading to the crucifixion and the dark days that followed? In spite of the risks and dangers, they remained true, and even continued to preach Jesus' message throughout the corners of the earth. It's amazing, isn't it? And, there are so many stories of the saints through the ages, who ignoring personal risk to themselves, were steadfast in their devotion to the Gospel.

Answering Jesus' call to follow him into the God life, doesn't assure us of things going our way. Just the opposite. Following Jesus, means opening ourselves to criticism, going against the grain; taking emotional and even physical risks; it means embarking on an uncharted highway, sure to take us through danger and... So, why follow?

Here at St. Andrew's, we're moving forward answering our call to be the face of Christ within our walls and beyond our doors. And there is a new energy here that excites us. Next week we will Baptize seven new members; confirm and receive eight. We've welcomed many new newcomers. We're filled with renewed confidence and hope. In all of this excitement and fervor, it's difficult to imagine that we can fail....But we will. As we continue to respond to God's call, we may be faced with difficult choices, we may face resistance, and we're sure to encounter obstacles. Statements like these may go through our minds from time to time...

- This isn't what I signed up for...

- This doesn't look like I thought was going to be...

- These aren't the people I thought we were going to serve...

I'm sure they are things that the apostles were thinking. Andrew must have said these things to himself or his brother Peter. Can't you imagine Andrew at some point saying to Peter, "Well, this is another fine mess you've gotten us into!"

Jesus has invited us on a journey fraught with great risk –it is a requirement of our discipleship. Big spiritual risks that push us way beyond our comfort zones. And exactly what are these spiritual risks? Very simply it's serving others who are unlike us - the poor, the weak, the marginalized, the afraid, and the lonely; strangers and weirdos; the annoying and the unreasonable. Those are the ones who Jesus calls us to love. Later in Matthew Jesus shocks the disciples by identifying himself as one of the rejected, and when the disciples protest, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" He answers, "...just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." Jesus really meant it. We are called to serve Christ in the most despised of the world. And in Advent as we prepare to welcome the baby Jesus as the incarnate God, it's easy for us to feel all joyful and loving with the image of a vulnerable infant. But, can we extend that lovingkindness from the baby in the manger to the homeless...or the imprisoned...or to migrants...or to Muslims...or to those that annoy us? Because that's the call. Jesus couldn't have been clearer.

Being part of the Jesus movement is well and dandy when it doesn't ask anything of us. But, what about when we're faced with those society rejects, those who we would reject? Can we reach out to them and offer them the love of Christ? The love of which gets down on it's knees and washes dirty feet? Or the love that stands next to someone who is being oppressed? Those are the sorts of things we're called to do. It's what Andrew and his brother Peter were called to. I'm sure they thought they were headed for glory when they first set out with him, especially Peter. I don't believe they were prepared to be among lepers and street urchins and tax collectors, and prostitutes, and Roman centurians. Those that stuck with him had their second thoughts, and their share of failure, being chased out of town, criticized, reviled, and eventually persecuted. They watched their leader hanged from a cross - why did they stay, why

did they continue to risk it all? It couldn't have just been for the promise of a better life after death...that wouldn't have sustained me for very long.

I believe they persevered because they saw the face of God, not just in Jesus, but in the lepers, and prostitutes, and Romans...and in one another, and in themselves. As Moses reassured the Jews in Deuteronomy, “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” This is what sustained them and pushed them forward, even after Jesus was gone...especially after Jesus was gone. They saw the face of God in loving others. It has happened to me any number of times, when I've least expected and also when I've asked God for help.

So it will be with us - Jesus' disciples at St. Andrews. As we continue on the journey that Jesus calls us we will be taking great risks. There will be failure, and doubt. It won't be comfortable. As we encounter obstacles we need to openly and honestly acknowledge our fears and reluctance, but must never deny that it's what God expects of us. We need to keep moving forward reminding ourselves of our vision - a Church that seeks to love as Christ loves, in our walls and beyond our doors. And, as we journey together, we will be guided and supported by the Holy Spirit; and we will take sustenance as we see the face of God in those we serve and in each other.