

The 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany: Holy Trinity Church: January 15, 2023

John 1: 29-42:

You can't help but be grateful, you can't help but be confident,

you can't help but be loving!

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

One of the great celebrative anthems that comes to us out of African-American culture is the powerful spiritual “Ain’t Got Time to Die.” It was written by Hall Johnson and it has these joyfully dramatic words: “Been so busy praising my Jesus, been so busy working for the Kingdom, been so busy serving my Master. Ain’t got time to die. If I don’t praise him, If I don’t serve him, the rocks gonna cry out. Glory and honor, glory and honor, ain’t got time to die.” In this inspiring and wonderful spiritual song, the composer is underscoring and celebrating the joy and excitement of being a Christian, the joy and excitement of serving our Lord in gratitude for what he has done for

us. The point that this spiritual is trying to drive home to us with great enthusiasm is... that when we really become Christians, when we really commit our lives to Christ... then, we can't sit still... we become so excited, so thrilled, so grateful for our new life in Christ that we can't help but love Him, praise Him, serve Him, and share Him with others.

This is precisely what happened to the Apostle Andrew. He found the Messiah, he encountered Jesus, and he was so excited he couldn't sit still. Immediately, gratefully, excitedly, he ran to share the good news with his brother Simon. It reads like this in the first chapter of John's Gospel:

"Andrew first found his brother, Simon and said to him: 'We have found the Messiah'" Then, Andrew brought Simon Peter to Jesus. This was the greatness of Andrew. He was the man who was always introducing others to Jesus. Three different times in the Bible, Andrew comes to center stage and each time he is bringing someone to meet Jesus.

Here in this day, the Gospel in John 1, 29-42 Andrew brings his brother Simon Peter. In John 6, Andrew brings to Jesus the boy with the five loaves and two fish. And in John 12, we find Andrew bringing to Jesus the enquiring Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus and visit with Him. Andrew's greatest joy was sharing the good news of Christ and bringing others into the presence of

Christ. After having found Jesus, Andrew could not sit still, he could not help it, he had to share Christ with others.

A priest friend of mine tells about a woman in his church who is so excited to be a Christian. She had a shady past and had pretty much hit bottom when a friend reached out to her and brought her to church. The church member welcomed her warmly and loved her into the circle of their love and God's love. She started going to church faithfully. She joined a wonderful Sunday School class. Wouldn't Holy Trinity Church love to have a Sunday School for our children?' She began studying the Bible daily. This woman started praying regularly and, in the process, she was converted. She realized for the very first time in her life that God loved her, even her! She came to understand that even though she had done all those sordid things in her earlier life, and that God still loved her, God forgave her, God accepted her, God valued her, God treasured her. She was absolutely bowled over by that "Amazing Grace" and she committed herself to Christ heart and soul. Recently, she said to her Priest, "I'm so excited to be a Christian, that I've got a strong case of the "can't help its."

This was also true of Andrew. He, too, had a strong case of the "can't help its." He was so grateful, so thrilled, so excited about Christ that he just could

not sit still. He could not keep Jesus to himself. You know, as I think about this and as I think about my own personal life and spiritual pilgrimage, I can tell you that I also have a strong case of the “can’t help its.” It goes with being a Christian. Let me show you what I mean by speaking out of my own personal life with three thoughts. Try these on for size with me , and I’m sure that you will think of others out of your own personal and spiritual life, but for now, let me share these three with you. First of all, because we are Christians, we can’t help but be grateful.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Andrew, along with the people of his time, was longing for a Messiah to come, hoping for a Messiah, praying for a Messiah. When he found the Messiah in Jesus, he was incredibly grateful. You know there is no such thing as an ungrateful Christian. Christianity by-definition is our grateful response to God for his love of the world and his gift to the world of Jesus Christ. Responsive gratitude. That’s what Christianity is all about.

A group of young students were asked by their school teacher to make a list of what they thought were the present-day Seven Wonders of the World.

Although there were some disagreements, the following seven things received the most votes: 1.) The Great Pyramids of Egypt, 2. The Taj Mahal, The 3.

The Grand Canyon, 4,) The Panama Canal, and the 5th ,The Empire State Building. The 6th St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the 7th, China's Great Wall.

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one quiet student had not turned in her paper yet. So, she asked the girl if she were having trouble with her list. The girl replied, "Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many." The teacher said, "Well, tell us what you have – read your list and maybe we can help." Hesitantly, shyly, the girl stood up and then read her paper out loud to the class. She said, "I think the Seven Wonders of the World are: 1. to be able to see. 2. to be able to hear. 3. to be able to touch. 4. to be able to feel. 5. to be able to taste. 6. to be able to laugh 7. to be able to love."

The room was so quiet when she finished that you could have heard a pin drop. Isn't it amazing how we overlook and take for granted the gifts that God has given us? We become so captivated by man-made things that we sometimes forget the astounding generosity of God. The psalmist did not make that mistake. Read the Psalms. They resound on page after page with praise and gratitude to God. The 100th Psalm is a classic example:

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all you land. Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord is God! It is he that
made us, and we are his. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter
his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him and
bless his name. or the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his
faithfulness to all generations.*

**This is just a sample of how the Psalms reverberate with gratitude. That same
theme of praise and gratitude is still very much in evidence in our present-day
hymnals. Hymns like, How Great Thou Art; Now Thank We All Our God;
Come, Ye Thankful People, Come, Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above; O
for a Thousand Tongues to Sing; Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee, and
hundreds more like these great hymns of gratitude fill our hymnals and our
hearts. Why? Because the great theme of our Christian faith, hope and love is
the spirit of gratitude, gratitude for God's presence with us, for God's watch
care over us, for God's forgiveness all of us, for God's salvation for us.**

**Let me ask you something. Do you feel gratitude to God that strongly? Do you
have a strong case of the "can't help it" when it comes to gratitude? When
you are Christians, gratitude is the spirit of your lifestyle. When you are a
Christian, you can't help but be grateful!**

Second, because we are Christians and we can't help but be confident. this was why, Andrew kept bringing people to Christ because of his confidence in the Lord. Things were not always perfect, times and situations were sometimes hard, but Andrew never lost his confidence in Christ. Andrew just did his best and then trusted God to bring it out right. Someone once asked me how I can seem always to be so serene, and poised and optimistic and confident. My answer was simple, "I am a Christian." That is simple as that.

A father and daughter were in their last moments together at the airport. The airline had announced her departure and standing there near the security gate, they hugged, and he said, "I love you and I wish you enough." She replied, "Dad, our life together has been more than enough. Your love is all I ever needed. I love you so much and I wish you enough, too, Dad." They hugged and held each other tightly and then she turned and left. The father walked over toward the window to watch his daughter's plane take off. Tears rolled down his cheeks. Another man had been watching them. The father turned to the man and said, "Did you ever say goodbye to someone knowing that you would not see each other again in this lifetime?" "Yes, I have," the man said. Please forgive me for asking, but why is this a final goodbye?" The father answered, "I am old now and not in good health and the real truth is that her next trip back will be for my funeral." "I'm sorry," said the stranger.

“It’s O.K. I have had a wonderful life and it will soon be over for me. But it’s been a great ride. God has blessed me, and God has always been with me and God will be with me in the life to come. I have no regrets. I trust God for whatever is ahead.” The other man said, “May I ask you about something? When you were saying goodbye, I heard you say, ‘I wish you enough.’ What does that mean?” The father smiled and said, “That’s a wish that has been handed down for many generations in my family. My parents used to say it to everyone.” When we say, “I wish you enough,” we are wanting the other person to have enough good things to sustain them. The wish goes like this:

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

I wish you enough adversity so the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

I wish you enough loss to be grateful for all you possess.

I wish; you enough hellos to get you through the final goodbyes.”

The father looked at the other man and said, “I wish you enough”... and then he turned and walked away.

Because we are Christians, we can be confident because in Christ, God gives us enough... enough strength to keep us going, enough forgiveness to make us a new creation, enough courage to enable us to stand tall when times are tough, enough assurance to convince us that ultimately God wins, and God wants to share his victory with us.

My sisters' brothers and sisters, here is the challenge, on this second Sunday after the Epiphany is the good news for all of us. Nothing can separate us from God's love and watch care; nothing, not trouble or pain or heartache or disappointment not even death can cut us off from God and his love. God is always with us. That is God's promise. So, because we are Christians, we can be grateful, and we can be confident. Third and finally, because we are Christians, we can't help but be loving. Again, Andrew is a great example of love. He was big-hearted, magnanimous, generous. He was a loving, caring person who was eager to share and anxious to help others. If only we could learn that lesson from Andrew's, life would be better for all of us. Learn to love like that, to reach out to people in need like that, to make a difference in people's lives like that? You know, don't you? The same place the disciple Andrew learned it from Jesus. You see, when you are a Christian, you get a strong case of the "can't help its." You can't help but be grateful, you can't help but be confident, you can't help but be loving. AMEN!