

Chosen for Chaos

Message #1 in the series, "Blessed (for Chaos)"

Matthew 4:18-22

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown
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¹⁸ As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

The first time I went deep sea fishing I got seasick. It was not pretty. I was a young teenager at the time and I was actually looking forward to the trip. It was my uncle's boat and he, my dad, my brothers and I were to set sail early in the morning, travel out beyond the bay into the deeper waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Once we hit those deeper waters . . . well, let's just say, the fish enjoyed some "non-traditional" bait that day. I can tell you with confidence, though, that I have been on boats in open waters since then – though, to be honest, I am both very selective as to what type of boat I get on, and I often have to talk myself into getting beyond my post-traumatic reaction.

You know, there are a number of reasons why it might not be pleasant – or even safe – to go out into the deeper waters of the ocean—especially when you've had bad experiences before, but in reality, the only safe boat is one that's moored to a pier or dry docked. In fact, to quote John Shedd, "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."¹ Ships are designed for something more. And so are we.

For those of us who are followers of Jesus, we understand that God is on a mission. And that mission involves three things:

- **First, God's mission involves RISK.** It means that often we will need to leave our comfort zone. We may even need to face into our fears – and actually challenge the things that tend to paralyze us, keeping us from living out God's best for us. It means that we will be asked to put God's purposes ahead of our own. We will need to risk for the sake of the gospel.
- **Second, the mission that God has in mind is no less than the transformation of the entire world.** God, you see, is on a mission to **HEAL THE WORLD** of its brokenness, of its separation from the heart of

God. That was the whole point of the Cross of Christ that we just celebrated at Easter.

- **Third, that mission requires PEOPLE.** Now, God doesn't "need" us to carry out His plan. But He *chooses* us to carry it out.

So, if the mission requires people, who, exactly, does God choose? This is an incredibly important question, but before I address it, let's look first at **who God does NOT choose.**

While God certainly uses a variety of people within a diversity of backgrounds, personalities, skills, passions and attitudes, it is clear that in order to carry out His mission, God prefers *not* to use those who *think they deserve it* (**Proverbs 6:17** and **21:4**). We call these types of people "the entitled." This is the type of person that we see in the caricature of the religious leaders – the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes. Jesus called them "hypocrites." I'm sure they didn't view themselves as entitled, but clearly, the way they treated others showed the evidence of their attitude.

God also does not typically use *those who say "no"* in response to His call. By virtue of giving us the freedom to respond either positively or negatively to His invitation, Jesus is not going to go chasing down those who say, "no." Take, for example, the encounter that Jesus had with the rich young ruler as recorded in Mark 10. The young man approaches Jesus and says,

"Good teacher . . . what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone." ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (**Mark 10:17-22**)

Notice that Jesus doesn't go running after the guy saying, "Wait! Come back! I was just kidding! We can cut a deal!" Instead, He lets the young man choose his response. God certainly continues to invite us, but He honors our "no."

So, **who does God choose?** In general terms, we know from the Bible that God tends to look for certain qualities in those whom He calls to carry out His mission. First, **God tends to look at a person's HEART, rather than their hang-ups.** Let's face it, if God waited for us to be perfect, He'd be waiting a very long time! We all have our hang-ups, our failures, our blemishes. We all have things in our lives or in our pasts that make us think that God could not possibly use *us* for His plans. But God sees inside, He sees our heart. In **1 Samuel 16:7**, we read --"*The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*"

Second, **God tends to look at a person's POTENTIAL, not just their present state.** Look at King David, for example. In spite of the fact that he committed adultery with Bathsheba, got her pregnant, and then tried to cover it up by having her husband, Uriah, killed, and also did a lot of other pretty harsh things, God saw beyond all of that and ended up calling David "a man after [God's] own heart" (**1 Samuel 13:14**). God certainly saw David's sins. He wasn't letting David off the hook – in fact, God held David very responsible for his actions. But God saw beyond all of that to all that David could become. God is able to do the same thing with *all* of those whom He chooses.

Third, **God looks at a person's COMMITMENT, not just their personal complexities.** When it comes to commitment, I think immediately of Daniel in the Old Testament. He and his friends are forcefully uprooted from their hometown and thrust into a life of slavery in a foreign nation. Under Babylonian rule, they are put into a "re-education" process – an attempt at redirecting their loyalties away from their former way of life, including away from their loyalties to God. In Daniel chapter 1, we read that these young men are provided with a king's diet as part of their re-training. But eating that diet would go against everything that Daniel and his friends believed in according to their faith.

In Daniel 1:8, we read --

⁸But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine . . ."

We all live within a complex world. Some of us have very complex lives as well. But God looks through all of those complexities into a person's resolve, into their commitment.

A person's heart. A person's potential. A person's commitment. That's what God looks at when choosing those who will carry out His divine mission.

Okay – so I want you to hear this right now . . . I know that some of you may be hearing this list of what God is looking at when He chooses those who will carry out His mission --- heart, potential, commitment --- and you're thinking, "See! That's not me! If God only knew what's going on in my heart and life . . . If God saw the way my life is going right now . . . Or . . . If God really knew me, He'd know I'm not big on commitments . . ."

But God does see you. Every part of your life. Your heart. Your potential. Your commitment --- as bad or as good as it is. And He has chosen you. He has chosen you. Just as you are. Just as He had chosen those original twelve disciples. God has chosen you to carry out His most important, life changing mission.

Today, we're beginning a new series that's going to focus on the Beatitudes – a very special section in chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel. The larger context of the Beatitudes is what has been called the "Sermon on the Mount." Actually, what we're going to discover is that Jesus is teaching this message not so much to a large crowd of people, but to His small group of specially selected disciples – twelve

ordinary guys. Twelve guys who had hang-ups, whose lives were rather complex and who struggled with getting up every day to face a world that was clearly getting them nothing and taking them nowhere.

In fact, I believe that the even larger context of the Sermon on the Mount – if we pull back just a little more in our view of this section of the Scriptures – is Jesus equipping those carefully chosen, deeply flawed disciples with all of what they would need – both skills and perspective – to eventually go on to change the world. The Beatitudes, I believe, describe the character, the attitude and the perspective of those who are meant to represent Jesus in the world.

In order to look at the Beatitudes, therefore, we have to start with those who were initially chosen. Look with me at Matthew 4, starting at verse 18 --

18 As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)

Notice a few things about this passage. First, notice the word, "**immediately**" – "Immediately [Simon and Andrew] left their nets and followed Him," "Immediately [James and John] left their boat and their father, and followed Him." Immediately. That's an important word in all four Gospels. When Matthew, Mark, Luke and John use that word in order to tell the readers about Jesus, they are actually portraying both the urgency of the divine mission as it begins to call people to new life, as well as revealing the swiftness of people's obedient response to that call. Jesus's invitation demands a response – no matter who you are, no matter what your life has been - up to that moment. When Jesus invites you, you've got to choose a response.

Look, **every choice that we make does two things**: First, our choice reveals our **CHARACTER**. Our character is a reflection of what we value, what's important to us. So, when we make a choice, we are literally separating out the things that do not align with our values and beliefs – at least, we hope so. Secondly, our choice sharpens our **OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S CALL**. That's right – whether good, bad or ugly, our choices are actually used by God to shape and sharpen God's unique call on our lives. Simon, Andrew, James and John . . . their knowledge of Jesus was limited at this point in their journey, but their response showed an immediacy to their obedience to that call. And their obedience revealed aspects of their character, qualities about their life stories that Jesus could see even when others could not.

The second thing I want you to notice about this passage is rather intriguing to me – something that only hit me this past week even though I've studied this passage for decades. This passage talks about Simon, Andrew, James and John all being

chosen by Jesus to come and follow Him. They are all fishermen by trade – and in response to some amazing miracles involving the catching of fish, as recorded in another one of the Gospels – each one of these guys immediately leaves their profession and their family and follows Jesus. Simon Peter, James and John – the three of them – all, in turn, become part of Jesus’s closest, most inner circle of trusted friends.

But . . . **What about Andrew?**

From what we know by reading all four of the Gospel accounts, Simon Peter, James and John – they all have character flaws. Simon Peter is impulsive and abrasive at times. He promises loyalty and then runs away scared in the heat of the moment. James and John – they, at one point, push themselves to the head of the line, asking Jesus to seat them on His right and left when He inaugurates His kingdom. That’s a pretty arrogant and presumptuous ask, right? – and it puts a bad taste in the other disciples’ mouths when they overhear the conversation.

But Andrew? What about him?

Andrew actually has a rather limited, but interesting storyline in the Gospels. He starts out as a disciple of John the Baptist. This is what we read in John 1, starting in verse 35 –

*³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "**What are you looking for?**" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "**Come and see.**" They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He **first found his brother Simon** and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² **He brought Simon to Jesus**, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). **(John 1:35-42)***

Notice that of all four of them – Simon, Andrew, James and John – Andrew, unlike the other three, **was already in a discipling relationship**. He was already being mentored into the divine mission by John the Baptist. Andrew was already primed and ready for what God had in mind. John the Baptist connects the dots for Andrew – introducing him to Jesus. After spending the day with Jesus and sitting under His teaching, the first thing that Andrew does is he goes and tells his brother Simon, and then brings Simon to meet Jesus.

Piecing the various Gospel accounts together, it appears that Andrew introduces Simon to Jesus and Jesus then changes Simon’s name to Peter – a name that means "Rock," showing that Jesus actually saw potential in Simon, the kind of

potential that would be needed to lead a world changing movement. Then these guys all go back to their jobs – fishing – until that day Jesus comes looking for them -- issuing the call to follow Him and to “fish for people.”

The next significant time we read about Andrew is in John 6:8-9 – the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000-plus people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple fish. Well, it’s actually Andrew who is the one who brings the young boy to Jesus whose lunch is used for the basis of the miracle.

Even though we don’t know a lot about Andrew in the Gospel accounts, what we do know is this: **Andrew brings people to Jesus. Andrew multiplies the Kingdom of God movement**

Just about two weeks or so ago, researchers came out with a new statistic that showed that as of 2020, only 47% of U.S. adults are members of a church, a synagogue or a mosque now. This statistic actually shows a significant drop from just 20 years ago. In 1999, 70% of Americans said they were members of a church, synagogue or mosque. According to that Gallop poll, the 23% decline seems to be due to a rise in the number of Americans who are stating that they no longer have any religious preference.

Now, we in the church could probably get defensive about that statistic. We might want to try to justify it by saying things like, “well, people just don’t trust organized religion,” or “there have been too many religious leaders who have disappointed us or disillusioned us by their behaviors – so we don’t trust the church.” Well, there’s certainly enough reasons to not trust the institutional church. But, I don’t really believe that that is what’s going on in today’s world --- at least, I don’t believe it’s the whole story.

Do you know what I think is the real problem? I think people are genuinely interested in experiencing the new life that Jesus offers. I think people are hungry to know Jesus, to encounter Jesus, and to experience that new life that He offers. I think people are looking for Jesus . . . but **they’re just not finding Him among those who call themselves the Church.**

Why is that? I think **we, the Church, have forgotten how to be disciples of Jesus.**

Do you remember that statistic – 47% of American adults today that are involved in a church versus 70% just 20 years ago? Well, there’s another statistic that we need to hear, too . . . namely, 71% of people would actually accept a personal invitation to join them at church if that invitation came from a family member, a friend, or a neighbor.² That means that roughly 3 out of every 4 people that you and I invite to join us at church would say yes.

But here’s the problem . . . we’re just not inviting.

According to a 2018 article in *Christianity Today*, only 53% of Methodists have said that they have ever invited at least one person to church. And only 15% of Methodists have invited three or more people – not just in a given year . . . we’re talking -- ever.³

Covid-19 also had an impact on church attendance and membership this past year. Statisticians are predicting that anywhere from 20-30 percent of church attenders will stop attending as a result of Covid-19 --- partly because of the fear of the unknowns of doing life together again, partly because people have become disillusioned with their faith during this season of isolation, and partly – dare I say it? – because people have gotten used to not going.

But what these researchers have also discovered is that while membership and attendance have declined, core discipleship – by that I mean, people making intentional decisions to live out their faith in Jesus – core discipleship has actually increased.

What all of this means is that in spite of the declines among “church goers,” current non-churched people are actually looking for meaning and purpose in their lives and they are open to being invited to “come and see” this Jesus who is so important to us . . . assuming, of course, that they *can* see that Jesus is *actually* important to us.

What it means is that **you and I – we can be Andrews.**

Why did Andrew bring people to Jesus? Because HIS life was changed by the message Jesus preached. HIS life was affected by the hope that Jesus brought. HIS life was inspired by the powerful words that he heard Jesus speak, by the profound things he saw Jesus do, by the humbling sacrifice that he witnessed Jesus make on the cross, and eventually by the incredible experience of the Holy Spirit that filled him on the day of Pentecost.

Changed lives go on to change lives. Has your life been changed by Jesus Christ?

We need to re-engage what it means to be a disciple – people who have been called by Jesus to bring hope to the world one life at a time. That’s what this message series is all about. We’re going to learn what it means to be disciples in a time of chaos.

And it starts with this: **We need to be a congregation of Andrews.** Even if our personality is more abrasive like Simon Peter’s, or we’re more brazen like James or John, or we’re more skeptical like Thomas, or we’re more hidden, more “off the pages of the story” like Bartholomew or Thaddeus . . . in this season of history, we need to be a congregation of Andrews. We need to bring people to Jesus.

So, I want to issue a two-part challenge for us in this message series.

- **First, I want to challenge each of us to pray each and every day that God would give us a heart and a passion for “fishing for people”** – that God would give us a heart for those who don’t know Jesus yet, that God would help us to see the people around us the same way that He sees them. Let’s re-engage what it means to be followers of Jesus, disciples who are chosen specifically to represent God’s love within this season of chaos that we’re living in right now.
- And second, **I want to invite you to join with me in breaking that 15% bracket – the 15% of Methodists who have invited three or more people to church. Let’s break that barrier.** I want to challenge each of us to invite three or more people to join us at church during the remaining months of this year. If you’re worshipping on-line, maybe that looks like asking them to watch the services with you. Or maybe you’re anticipating when you’re planning to return to in-person worship – ask them to join you as you come back. If you’re in-person now, pray about who God wants you to invite to join you in any of the service options on any given week.

Remember, statistically, 3 out of 4 people will say yes when you invite them. Who knows . . . your invitation may be just what they have been waiting for.

You and I – we’ve been chosen for chaos. Will you be an Andrew?

Let’s pray our prayer together: **Lord, what do you need me to see, what do you need me to hear, what do you need me to know, what do you need me to do? I am your servant in Jesus’s name. Amen.**

¹ Fred R. Shapiro, *The Yale Book of Quotations*, Section: John A. Shedd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 705.

² <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts/behaviors/71-unchurched-say-they-are-likely-accept-personal-invitation-family-member>

³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/july/inviting-friends-church-lifeway-research.html>. Churchgoers who attend Assemblies of God or other Pentecostal churches (71%) and those who attend non-denominational churches (69%) are more likely to say they’ve invited at least one person to church. Lutherans (55%) and Methodists (53%) are less likely. Forty-three percent of Methodists say they had not invited anyone, as did 41 percent of Lutherans. Fewer nondenominational (20%), Baptist (22%) or Assemblies of God/Pentecostal (23%) churchgoers skipped invitations. Churchgoers who are Baptist (31%) or Assemblies of God/Pentecostal (30%) are more likely to have invited three or more people than Lutherans (17%) or Methodists (15%).