

The Great Relief of God's Good News

TV news has, in this era of pandemic, gained a reputation for being the purveyors of bad news. Night after night, hearing reports of the expanding virus and rising death tolls has become just too much for some people. Is there any good news out there anywhere? One CBS reporter named Steve Hartman is finding some. Every Friday on their 6:30 p.m. broadcast, his is always the last report of the week and it is ALWAYS good news. Here's a sample.

[Play video from CBS Kindness 101 - Empathy start at 9:00 go to 12:00)

Isn't good news a great relief? This brings us to our Faith Affirmation, which is the second part of #7 that we began last week. Affirmation #7 deals with the two-part purpose and work of the Church: Being Gathered and being Scattered. The second half reads...

We believe that God has laid upon the members of the local Church the primary task of giving the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. [add verses]

This speaks of our primary task. Do you see it? Our "primary task" is giving Good News to our world. The word "gospel" means "good news." And it's demonstrated by a great biblical model. No, not Jesus. No, not the apostle Paul or the apostle Peter. Yes, it's an apostle, but not one of the "inner circle." No, it's the apostle Andrew. Andrew is a Good-News giver who loves his job. So, first we need to see:

I. To Whom Did Andrew Give Good News?

There's a new word being used for evangelism today. It's the word "gospeling," as in Luke 9:6 where it says literally of the disciples...

And going forth they went through the villages gospeling and healing everywhere.

In most translations, we find the English word "evangelizing" there or the phrase "preaching the gospel." And the Greek word does primarily mean to "tell or proclaim a message," but preaching in our culture has taken on a mostly negative meaning. If someone is coming on too forcefully, the other person will likely say, "Hey, don't preach at me!" Now, preaching is telling, but there are other ways to tell or proclaim good news besides preaching. Andrew did very little preaching but he did a lot of "gospeling." Let's take a look.

In the Gospel of John we find three incidents of Andrew's "gospeling." One is with his own brother Simon, whom Jesus would rename Peter. The second is with a young boy in a huge crowd. And the third is with a group of perfect strangers. Each of these incidents has a shared strategy: Andrew was "gospeling" by bringing people to meet Jesus. He wasn't debating with them or shouting at them or arm twisting. He was just bringing them. Each of these incidents represents a group of people who need to meet Jesus. We could categorize them as the Receptive, the Reluctant, and the Rascals. Let's take a moment to examine each.

First, Andrew brought his Receptive brother Simon to Jesus. Andrew was Simon's younger brother. Recent research has identified certain characteristics of siblings that are determined by birth order. I don't know if these characteristics are always true, but Simon and Andrew definitely fit the pattern. Simon was a typical older brother: decisive, bold, an initiator. Andrew was a typical younger brother: a negotiator, friendly, relational. Andrew and Simon worked together as fisherman. My guess is that Simon set production goals and Andrew handled public relations and sales.

Both Andrew and his brother Simon were seekers after God. We know this because of what is written about them in John 1. In verses 35-39, we see that Andrew was first a follower of John the Baptist. To be a follower of John the Baptist, you had to take your religion seriously. John the Baptist was anything but culturally correct. He openly criticized politicians. He openly criticized the religious establishment. He dressed like a freak, ate only organic, and lived in a cave. This guy today would NOT be welcome on Wall Street. And Andrew believed every word that John the Baptist said. Including when John saw Jesus and said:

... “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36)

Immediately, Andrew checked out Jesus. Now, Andrew probably already knew OF Jesus. He would’ve watched John baptize Jesus, and seen the dove descend on Him. Undoubtedly, Andrew had already been thinking that Jesus was someone special. So, when John confirmed Andrew’s thoughts, he followed Jesus to where He was staying and spent the whole day with Him. At four o’clock in the afternoon Andrew made a decision that literally shook the world. After confirming for himself that Jesus was the Anointed One, the first thing he did was go and tell this good news to his brother Simon. That’s all he did. He just gave him good news. Verse 41:

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” ... (John 1:41)

Why was this the first thing Andrew did? Did he do it because as a child he had been forced to sign a pact always to tell his brother everything? Did he tell Simon about Jesus because he was afraid that, if he didn’t, Simon would beat him up? NO!!! He told his brother about Jesus because he had found something great and he knew Simon would be receptive.

My older brother Alan and I were roommates for a year in college. Alan had an awesome stereo. He’d actually made the amplifier from a kit and we loved finding new kinds of music. I remember one of my brother’s favorite finds was Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen.

But I’ll never forget the day I was in a record store (for those of you under thirty: before streaming, before CDs, even before cassette tapes, back in the stereo Stone Age, there used to be these things called “records.” You put them on a turntable and they would play music. Look it up on the web.) Anyway, I was in this record store and I found the first album of a guy named James Taylor. This was a store where you could listen to albums before you bought them. I listened. I liked! I bought. What was the first thing I did? I went running to find my brother. Why? Because I had to? No. BECAUSE I KNEW HE WOULD LOVE THIS MUSIC! The first thing Andrew did after he met Jesus was to tell his receptive brother. Who do you know who could use some Good News in their life right now?

In **John 6:8, 9** we find the second person Andrew honored with Good News. It was a Reluctant young boy. Now, when you read these verses it says:

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

Now, someone will rightly point out, “Pastor, that doesn’t say anything about a “reluctant” boy. What makes you think he was reluctant?” One reason: because he was a boy. You see, in the other gospels it tells us that it was evening when the boy was brought to Jesus. Do you understand what this means? This kid had been saving his lunch all day! He was one of those kids who just hung on to his lunch while everyone else was eating, just so that when everyone else was starving to death, he could sit back, take out his napkin and in a prominent place just drive everyone else crazy by s-l-o-w-l-y enjoying his food. I mean, among five to ten

thousand people, how do you suppose Andrew found one kid who still had food left? I think it was because everyone else was getting ready to attack him!

Is it possible that the boy stepped forward voluntarily? Yeah, I think that's possible, but consider this: the other gospel writers don't even mention the boy! When Jesus asks about how much food there is, they all say, "WE have five loaves and two fish." My guess is, they had already wrestled it away from the kid. Only Andrew is sensitive enough to identify the fact that the lunch actually BELONGS to the Reluctant boy.

My point is this: only Andrew saw the person behind the reluctance. It wasn't about fish and loaves for Andrew, it was about a boy.

As you look around your world today, what do you see? If you turn off your TVs, and close your computer, and mute your phone for like thirty minutes, from your house where you're sitting right now, what do you see? Looking out your windows, you see neighbors, right? That's what Liz and I see.

In a book by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon entitled, *The Art of Neighboring*, they ask this question, "When Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves, what if He meant we should love our actual neighbors?" The first step in doing that would have to be actually to know their names, wouldn't it? Right now, do you know the names of everyone who lives in the four- six houses that are closest to your house? Learning the names of your neighbors would put a huge smile on Jesus' face! It would be a big step toward loving your neighbor as yourself.

I don't know which of the disciples first made contact with that young boy, but Andrew is the only one who acknowledged that the lunch was his. And, as unsure as Andrew might have been about what was going to happen next, still he brought the boy to Jesus. He must have felt deep down, "It doesn't matter what I think should be done, Jesus will know what to do." And what Jesus did must have just blown that little boy's mind!!! His lunch fed 10,000 people and there were leftovers!! Because Andrew gave him an experience of the Good News of Jesus, I'm positive that young boy left that meal so full, that he was "gospeling" all the way home!!

You see, Jesus doesn't expect every Christian to be an evangelist like Billy Graham. Oh, He'll see to it that there are always a handful in every culture. What Jesus does expect is that every Christian be an Andrew, someone who knows the names of his or her neighbors and cares what's happening in their lives like they care about themselves.

But there's one last group to whom Andrew gave the gospel, and these were perfect strangers. Andrew brought the Receptive, the Reluctant, and, finally, he even brought the Rascals to meet Jesus. John 12:20-22 is describing the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem by Jesus. Pilgrims from all over Israel were coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was an incredible Jewish-only celebration. I mean, what could be more ethnically exclusive than the Passover?

On top of that, it was the last week of Jesus' life. My guess is that He was rather focused. He knew what was going to happen, so He must've been psyching Himself up for the final titanic struggle with evil. And who are these Greeks anyway? Verse 20 says: (John 12:20)

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.

Who were these guys? Most scholars agree that, essentially, they were tourists. William Barclay states that the wealthy Greeks were the first to wander the ancient world just for the sake of wandering. Way up the Nile, on an Egyptian statue, what have archaeologists found? A Greek traveler scratched his name on the statue! It's the first graffiti in history! Barclay concludes, "There is no need to be surprised to find a detachment of sightseeing Greeks even in Jerusalem."ⁱ

What did they do? Verse 21: (John 12:21)

So these came to Philip ... and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Why did they want to see Jesus? Probably because it was “the thing to do.” If they had had cell phones, they’d have taken selfies with Him. They were rascals! Their motives weren’t pure! Philip isn’t sure what to do. So, he goes and asks Andrew. What does Andrew do? When Andrew didn’t know what to do, he did one thing: brought them to Jesus. Together Philip and Andrew bring the tourists to hear Jesus speak his final public sermon, in which God actually spoke out loud to Jesus. Andrew and Phillip bring these rascals to meet Jesus and they witness an incredible miracle! At the end of His sermon, Jesus gives this invitation: (John 12:36)

“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

Can you imagine the impact this must’ve had on those Greek tourists?

So, let’s review. How much preaching did Andrew do in these three incidents? Basically none. He told his brother he’d found the Messiah but we have no record of his saying anything to the boy or to the Greek tourists. So, no preaching just what? Just bringing the Receptive, the Reluctant and the Rascals to Jesus. Do you think you could do that? The final question, then, is how.

II. How Can I Become A “Gospeling” Disciple like Andrew?

First, let’s go back to that “neighboring” concept. If you go on our website and click on the Valley+ page you’ll see a link labeled “Neighboring Toolkit.” Click on that and you’re going to find a slew of simply wonderful and easy ideas for how you can begin to love your neighbors like Jesus asked you to do. And all of these things are totally compatible with our “social distancing” requirements. Things like:

- Introducing yourself by a note in their mailbox.
- When you see neighbors walking by, ask how they’re coping with all this.
- Ask any older neighbors if you could run errands for them.
- Create a Block Map of your neighborhood and begin praying for them by name.

Is preaching required here? No, just neighboring; just showing the love of Jesus. You can do this! We all can do this! So, check out the Block Map in the Neighboring Toolkit on the Valley+ page.

But secondly, what if the topic of faith comes up? For example, what if one of your neighbors asks you what you believe about God? Hey, if you’re praying for them, it could happen! Out of the blue, the Greek tourists said, “We wish to see Jesus!” What would you say if one of your neighbors asked you that?

Okay, check this out. We’ve got a great resource for that situation as well. The Christian organization CRU (formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ) has some awesome apps. We’ve provided a link on our website to one called “God Tools.” It’s an app you can put on your phone and use to walk someone through four simple steps of how the Bible says you can have a personal relationship with God. Andrew may not have been big on preaching, but he was very big on introducing people to Jesus. This app enables you to do just that. If you just don’t feel comfortable using your phone or iPad for something like this, we’ve got booklets that do the same thing. Just contact us at church: we’ll get you supplied.

Gospeling and neighboring, that’s how we fulfill our mission of being scattered by God. Meeting people’s physical and emotional needs can open the door of their heart to receive the solution to their most important need: their need for Jesus. Being a good-news giver is God’s method for us to do that. Start in your neighborhood. Let people in your world experience what you’ve experienced: the Great Relief of God’s Good News. Let’s pray...

ⁱ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2(Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 120