

Streetsville United Church
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"BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS"

John 1:42

Back when I was in college taking preaching courses, one professor told us not to use a lot of illustrations about Mother Teresa or John Wesley or Billy Graham or Albert Schweizer or other "super-Christians." He told us to refrain from holding them up as examples. Why? Well, because these people tend to overwhelm ordinary Christians, who think, "Oh, I could never do that. You can't expect that of me." And to a point it's true. Sometimes I go to conferences where famous preachers or Christian leaders are speaking and rather than being inspired by it, I actually come home feeling quite depressed and inadequate. For example, I respect Bill Hybels of the Willow Creek Church and enjoy his books and programs. It's great how he and his church have been able to bring so many people to Jesus, but honestly, his energy and gifts and accomplishments just overwhelm me. To bring it closer to home, I could mention Bruxy Cavey of the Meeting House. Just thinking about his effectiveness for Christ and his ministry is a humbling experience. So I know what my professor meant. He told us to use stories of ordinary Christians who use their gifts for God. Such stories don't lead us into despair, but rather help us to think about how we can use our own gifts to make a difference.

One ordinary follower of Jesus was Andrew. We meet him in John's Gospel, chapter one. He was first a disciple of John the Baptist. But one day John was with Andrew and another disciple. As Jesus walked by John exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" So Andrew and the other turned from John and began following Jesus. At Jesus' invitation they stayed with him that night. No doubt they spoke well into the wee small hours. First thing the next morning Andrew found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." Then he brought Simon to Jesus. (John 1:42)

A simple thing, wasn't it? He brought Simon to Jesus. This was Andrew's thing. In John 6, we read of Jesus multiplying a boy's lunch in order to feed thousands. And it was Andrew who had brought that boy to Jesus. Then in John 12, Andrew brought some enquiring Greeks to Jesus at the Festival. But that's all we hear of Andrew. Andrew was one of Jesus' disciples, but he was not on the level of Peter, James and John. Andrew was not a superstar. He simply brought people to Jesus. And it all started with his own brother. He brought

Simon to Jesus.

This is one of the greatest things any Christian can do for another person - bring them to Jesus. In fact, the church's prime mission is to bring people to Jesus. The church which is faithful to this mission stands while the church that ignores it withers and dies. One reason the churches I mentioned earlier are so successful is because of their laser-like focus on bringing people to Jesus. Now not all faithful churches will be so successful in terms of numbers. But they will surely stand and be blessed by God. Bringing people to Jesus is the church's #1 priority. And that's true no matter whether a church is conservative, middle-of-the road or liberal in its outlook. And the church keeps bringing even long-time believers to Jesus because we must all be growing in Christ and in our understanding and application of what he said and did. I make no apologies for constantly telling you the old, old story of Jesus and his love. "He brought Simon to Jesus."

The first thing to think about is this. **People need to be brought to Jesus.** They don't naturally gravitate towards Jesus. I've heard people say, "I'm not going to teach my children about faith. They can make their own decisions when they get older." That is a great cop-out and reflects the parents' lack of spiritual depth. It doesn't work anyway. If people come to Jesus on their own, why is that so many don't have any idea about Jesus or the faith he founded. To many people, the name Jesus is little more than a curse word. In many of the funerals and weddings I conduct, it's almost embarrassing when I invite people to join together in the Lord's prayer. Often it seems I'm the only one in the church praying. I'm actually considering dropping the Lord's prayer out of some, not all, but some weddings and funerals.

The fact is that most people who come to Jesus are brought by someone who is a follower of Jesus. In some way they are invited to "come and see." Most people need an introduction.

Who brought you to Jesus? Was it your mother, your father, another family member? Was it a Sunday School teacher, a minister, a friend? Who first told you the stories of Jesus? Who told you about his life, his teachings, his death for your sins, his resurrection from the dead? Who told you that He is the Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away your sins and mine? Who brought you to Jesus, so that you could find in Him your light, Your guide, Your hope, your forgiveness and the friend who will never fail or forsake you? You are, right now, a follower of Jesus and a Christian believer because someone brought you to Jesus. Often it was more than one person. That was true for me. It was in my home at my mother's knee that I first heard about Jesus. In fact, I still have the

children's picture book that she used to tell me his story. And then I heard about Jesus in Sunday School, from various ministers and teachers who influenced me over the years. I had good conversations with one or two close friends about Jesus. All this helped bring me to Jesus and to strengthen my faith in Him.

You and I didn't come to Jesus out of thin air. People rarely do. We came to Jesus because someone brought us to Jesus. "He brought Simon to Jesus."

Now here's the second thing we need to say. **The church's prime mission is bringing people to Jesus, therefore you and I have a part in the mission.** For the church is you and me, all of us.

Sometimes I am visiting a member of the church and they say something like, "How are things going at your church?" or "I really like the music at your church," or "I'd like to make a donation to your church." But this is coming from a member of the church. And I gently say to the person, "Well, thank you, but it's not my church. It's your church too. Let's think of it as our church."

I know that many of us consider faith a very private thing. But together we are the church and we all have a part in its' mission of bringing others to Jesus. Look where Andrew started - with his brother. You may be reluctant to start a spiritual conversation with a neighbour or a co-worker. I understand that. So start with a family member. We all have some family members who are outside the church, who don't have a relationship with Jesus. Why not say to them the simple words, "Come and see?" Or better, "Come with me and see." We're not embarrassed by our church, at least I hope not. If you find comfort and strength and hope here, don't you think they might, also? And one thing for sure, is that they will hear about Jesus in this place, through word and music.

If you are a Sunday School teacher or a study leader or a music leader you have an obvious role in bringing people to Jesus. But we all have a role in it. You don't have to be a superstar Christian. In your own way you can be an Andrew. If we're doing a course like Alpha or something else, you could be the volunteer who helps prepare meals or the meeting area. Just doing your part to make the church a warm and welcoming place helps bring people to Jesus.

And you never know what you may start when you bring someone to Jesus. Andrew brought Simon to Jesus and Jesus said to him, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas", (that is, Peter). Did Andrew know that Simon would one day become a leading apostle? Of course not. He just brought him to Jesus, and let Jesus do his work in him. So it is for us. We are not responsible for the final outcome. We simply bring people to Jesus and let Jesus

do his work in them. The church's prime mission is bringing people to Jesus and each of us has a part in it. "He brought Simon to Jesus."

Finally this. **If the church's first priority is to bring people to Jesus, then the second priority, right behind it, is to bring Jesus to people.**

They say "you can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." But what if the horse won't be brought to the water? What if people won't be brought to Jesus? Well, we don't despair, because we can bring Jesus to them. The church's mission is not only to bring people here to Jesus, but to go from here to bring Jesus to the world. That stands behind all mission really, whether it's sharing the Gospel or doing good works in Jesus' Name at home and around the world. You may not be a five talent Christian, but you can do an unexpected kindness for someone; you can sit by the bedside of a dying person who has no family; you can reach out to someone from whom you're estranged; you can give a warm blanket to a cold person or a cup of water to a thirsty person; you can pray for someone in need. You can tell someone that you do these things because you follow Jesus. And some day someone may ask you, "Will you tell me more about this Jesus?" By bringing Jesus to someone you may be bringing that person to Jesus.

Alexander White, one of Scotland's great preachers, noticed a famous scientist attending worship. White resolved to do all he could to win him to Christ. For several weeks he preached sermons that would appeal to the scientific mind. White was delighted when the scientist professed his faith and joined the church. He asked him what led him to do this, supposing it would be those sermons. But he never mentioned them! Instead, he told how an old woman spoke to him on the steps of the church one Sunday and asked him simply, "Are you a Christian?" He replied, "I'm thinking about it." "Oh," she said, "'Do come further in than that! Jesus Christ means the world to me!" And the scientist said, "As I looked at her radiant face and her shining eyes, I knew she had a secret which I didn't have, and I wanted it with all my heart." She brought him to Jesus. Or did she bring Jesus to him? Well, it doesn't matter. Because either way God used her in mission.

You don't have to be a great Christian to do something potentially great and life-changing for someone. "He brought Simon to Jesus." If you ask those preachers I mentioned about the success of their church, they would give God the glory, but they would also tell you that it has to do with ordinary Christians bringing others to Jesus with simple words of invitation as simple as "Come and see."