All in the Family 3: Andrew, Apostle
Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

John 1:35-42
The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 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?’ 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. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). 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).

Many of you have commented favorably on our Summer Sermon Series, “All in the Family.” You’ve shared some stories about some rather colorful, shall we say, family members of yours, characters who sometimes tested the limits of family love and solidarity, while certainly adding spice to the mix. I cherish the memory of my own Aunt Margaret, who heard voices, who married and divorced and re-married my Uncle John four times, and who ended up living in Puerto Rico, which, to a kid like me who was born and raised in Arizona, was about as exotic as you could get. Kinda crazy—but totally kind, and I loved her dearly. I just never wanted to have to sit by her at Thanksgiving!

Family’s like that, isn’t it? Early yesterday morning as our Youth Service Project Team set off for their work-site in Oregon, I said a little “we are family” prayer. All those kids and their adult leaders—you saw them up here last week—crammed into two vans. They’ll become family in ways they can’t yet imagine, and God willing, they’ll come back not only with new friends, but maybe just a little bit, also loving the kids they think are weird. That’s family. Keep them all in your prayers this week.

I’m sure that over the course of this trip, they’ll have an experience we all have. You say something to someone—and as soon as the words come out of your mouth, you wish you could just suck them back in. You say something—and the other person looks hurt, gets mad, takes offense, clam up, walks away, lashes back,…and sometimes you don’t know why they respond as they do. “Was it something I said?” you keep asking yourself?

There’s a classic cartoon from the New Yorker on this subject drawn by Tom Cheney, whose work often focuses in on life’s minor daily irritations. This one could easily have been a scene in the TV show “All in the Family” that inspired this sermon series in the first place.

It shows a man sitting in an overstuffed chair in his living room. He looks angry. His wife is behind him in the doorway, apron on, drying a dish after dinner, and in the little cloud above her head is asking herself: “was it something I said?” The family dog is on the rug nearby peering at the man, and he’s asking himself: “was it something I buried?” The cat is asking: “was it something I dropped in?” And the parrot perched in his cage asks: “Was it something I repeated?”

In the great, mysterious ecology of family, the things we say and do over time build and break and rebuild the bonds that connect us one to another. Sometimes they hurt, to be sure, but then again sometimes the things we say can open up whole new windows of insight and possibility.

Case in point—our cousin-in-the-faith, Andrew, number 3 in our “All in the Family” series. Andrew, the lesser-known brother of Simon Peter who gets a big chunk of air time in the Jesus story. Peter we know—a leading disciple, one of the first called, who pledges to love Jesus and then denies him three times, but is brought back into the fold and becomes “the rock” on which the church is built. We know Peter and his story. But Andrew? Who was he? And what does he reveal to us about discipleship?

From the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, we learn that Andrew was also one of the twelve. Simon Peter’s brother, they were both fisherman from Bethsaida, fishing in Capernaum when Jesus of Nazareth called them to become fishers of people according to Matthew and Mark. John tells the story a bit differently. They were both disciples first of John the Baptist, he recounts. Andrew follows Jesus after he hears John say of Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God.”

According to John’s version of the story, it is then Andrew who goes and gets Peter and literally brings him to Jesus, saying to him: “We have found the Messiah.”
It is Andrew who first connects the dots. It is Andrew who makes the links—thatJesus of Nazareth is theLamb of God is the Messiah. This man Jesus, Andrew eagerly tells his brother, is God’s anointed Messiah.

Only then do both brothers leave their nets to go and follow.

I wonder if later that night as they are falling off to sleep rehearsing the amazing developments of that day, if just maybe Andrew asked himself: “was it something I said?” Totally. “We have found the Messiah.” Because of what Andrew gave voice to that day, a movement was born and lives were changed forever.

Andrew had an uncanny ability to “see” and then to say just the right thing. Later on in Jesus’ ministry it happens again. Jesus is on a hillside preaching to thousands of people. As the day goes on they get hungry and cranky and there is nothing to eat. It is Andrew who goes to Jesus and says: “you know, Jesus, there is a little boy here…he has two loaves of bread and five fish…” And the rest is history. Andrew sees with eyes of faith and is thus empowered to say the needful thing.

Cousin Andrew. We don’t know much about him. But what little we do know gives us a pivotal role model of faith. Sometimes as disciples, what we are called and blessed to do, is to see with eyes of faith and to say the needful thing to someone standing in the need of grace.

In every generation, God needs spokespeople. God needs people who will say clearly to another person—a brother, (Andrew to Peter), a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, a son or daughter: “this is what I believe…and I believe it can be life-giving for you, too.”

We Methodists are sometimes a little shy about that, aren’t we? We’re polite. We don’t want to offend. We don’t want to turn someone off with something we’ve said. So we tend not to say much about our faith.

Sometimes we need a little help in doing so. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve visited someone in the hospital to find them covered in their prayer quilt. And because it’s right there and so beautiful, people start asking about it. And pretty soon you’ve got all the nurses and aides and visitors praying, too. It’s amazing. The quilt itself seems to give everyone permission to speak of things like faith, and prayer, and God. It’s as if the quilt itself is saying “we have found the Messiah,” “we have found a treasure,” as St. John Chrysostom puts it. We have found a treasure! Come and see!

Living as we do, in an age more of seeking than of overt religious affiliation, we Methodists need to reclaim a bit of our own DNA. This practice of speaking our faith plainly was a practice of ours from the time of John Wesley himself. He first learned it from the Moravians in Germany who followed the practice of what was called “the Love Feast.” The Love Feast was a simple worship service of sharing food, prayer, conversation about matters of faith, and hymns of praise. Anyone could participate, including children. Because it was not a formal service of Holy Communion, it was not necessary to have an ordained clergyperson present. No one had to be a member of any particular group.

People gathered to sing, to read Scripture together, take a collection for the poor, and to share in a meal together. Praise of God was always a central component, as was “testimony,” that is personal witness to God’s grace in one’s own life or that one had seen in the lives of others. Frequently prayers, testimony and singing would be interspersed and continued spontaneously as the Spirit moved. Andrew’s ancient proclamation that “We have seen the Messiah” was thus lived out and recounted anew around the table, all in the family, enlivened and renewed by the presence of the living God.

As we go out into this new week, I invite you to draw inspiration and courage from Cousin Andrew and from our Methodist forefathers and foremothers who found it perfectly natural to speak up and share their faith from the heart. Think about who in your circle might be hungry for a life-giving word and how you might share that in a way that can be appreciated and received. Invite someone into that which is life-giving for you. Be gracious, be invitational, but try saying something. For while our faith is personal and intimate, it is not private, but rather it is something to be shared, like those loaves and fishes, that God might work miracles through what we do and say. Sure it’s a risk, but just maybe something you say to someone in love will open the door to God’s healing power and grace.

We’ve found a treasure! Come and see!