



# SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Sermon for Sunday, July 8, 2018

*The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost*

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Ezekiel 2:1-5 | Psalm 123 | 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 | Mark 6:1-13

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I think it's safe to say that while the Church has endured some substantial challenges over the years it is still big business. But no one would confuse Jesus with a Fortune 500 CEO. Yet, as the leader of any enterprise does, Jesus also faces the dilemma of finding a qualified work force for his mission.

In this morning's gospel, we see Jesus passing a significant milestone in the early days of his ministry. He makes a final visit to his hometown where he receives a less than lukewarm reception, which gives Jesus permission to move on with the work he came to do. What began as the effort of a solitary preacher is now ready for expansion. So he gathers his followers and sends them out to preach, teach and heal. St. Mark gives us no clue as to why Jesus chose whom he did. What we do know is that these twelve appear to be particularly unsuited for the task they were called to do. Repeatedly they fail to understand Jesus' power. They never fully grasp the significance of what was going on around them, and show little personal initiative. In today's economy these men would be among those left behind in the job market, discarded for lack of relevant skills or the ability to move with the demands of the times.

In Jesus' day the savvy, the super intelligent, the individuals with desirable talent were snatched up for service to the Empire or some established religious institution. That left Jesus with a group of fishermen and other low-tech types from which to choose. Which, unlike a Fortune 500 chief, doesn't seem to have concerned him at all. What Jesus was looking for had nothing to do with marketable skills, and everything to do with how choices are made.

In launching his ministry, Jesus issued a broad call. Many people were curious and followed, at least for a while. Crowds were always to be found wherever Jesus was, and in time, he settled on twelve who would be his inner circle, with whom he would share everything. They would be his disciples, and enter into his work, based on what they heard and seen Jesus do.

People came to Jesus because they saw something they wanted for themselves. Jesus called it, 'Love' that God makes freely available to anyone who wants it. Those first followers were people who chose not to settle for life as they had known it. It was a time of many possibilities and great potential. For those who seized the opportunity, a door opened on the most important choice a person will make – whether to accept or reject God's love. It sounds simple, but that's the last thing it is. Choosing to accept God's love requires that we choose to be loved. That takes work, especially for those of us who have reached the disillusioning age when we've come to know that not everyone we meet is going to make love a way of life.

A couple of weeks ago I had the privilege of spending eight days with ten young men and two of their teachers on their Journey to Adulthood pilgrimage to San Diego. This was my fifth pilgrimage with our young people. Each pilgrimage has been different, challenging and fulfilling in its own way. While our youth formation program puts a lot of emphasis on using the Christian message to instill adult values and standards in their hearts and minds, one tension we face is that we are still dealing with children. And as one who bears some responsibility for their safety and well-being I am very aware that while these students are on the cusp of adulthood, they are not quite there yet.

It's a tired cliché to say that there's a lot we can learn from children; but their innocence, their energy, their enthusiasm, their free capacity to love, and their desperate need to be loved are things that are easy to appreciate in children. Childhood, especially teenaged childhood, is a time of many possibilities and great potential. And because they have yet to display their marketable worth in an economy dominated by the bottom line, they can point to a basic truth that is easy for adults to forget. I've never met a young person, even with their doubts and questions, and striving to establish their own independence, who has the capacity to outright reject God's love. That's a skill that only we grown-ups possess. At what point did we develop it? I wish I knew.

Each day the group was briefly introduced to the life and work of a saint that would somehow be reflected in the activity for that day:

- St. Francis who sought to bring a message of pardon, hope and joy to a fractured world on the day we visited a Franciscan mission built largely with slave labor.
- St. Michael, patron of the armed services which are so prominent in a place like San Diego and the tension that creates with a faith that preaches peace, as we visited the impressive USS Midway Museum.
- St. Paul whose work was so instrumental in establishing what we now call The Church and what it means to be a member of it, when we visited the Episcopal Cathedral in San Diego.
- While on a hike in the desert we talked of St. Christopher whose life was dedicated to service, as model for figuring out who we should serve with our gifts and abilities.
- Our Lady of Guadalupe, an image precious to people of Mexican heritage in establishing their Christian identity. What image would we use to identify ourselves as a member of the kingdom of God?

Admittedly these are some intense topics and can't be fully addressed in eight days, even a lifetime. But finding answers to tough questions is not the goal of these activities or even of our overall formation program for young people. For me, and I think I speak for their teachers in saying this, one of the primary goals of our efforts is to instill a knowledge in these young people that they are loved and that they, by their words and actions, can also love in Christ's name. Maybe that's why Jesus called his followers, 'children.' Jesus clearly saw in children a set of skills that are vital to his work.

So where does that leave us grown-up, world-weary adults? Well, we can accept the realities of life as they present themselves, and resign ourselves to our own limitations. Or, we can look for something more, something beyond ourselves. I'm not encouraging anyone to indulge in a second childhood. In addition to their many virtues, children can also be extremely focused on themselves. That's not a skill that's attractive in anyone, regardless of their age. But all of us, regardless of our age, have the capacity to love and be loved.

After 80 or so generations, Jesus is still in business. No corporation can make that claim. How many of the current Fortune 500 will still be around at the end of this generation? Jesus is also still looking for a qualified work force. The one skill that was important at the beginning of his mission is important today. While these young people keep me optimistic for the future, we older folks are not off the hook. Ours is an age of many possibilities and great potential. Let's not waste it.