

John 1:40-47 Bearing Witness

People need the Lord. It is time for the church to rise up and become more effective in our witness. This passage can help us to be better witnesses, which often we don't find easy. It contains a classic model for Christian witness. Bruce Milne writes, *Herein lies the secret of the extraordinary spread of Christianity in the early centuries, as the historian Gibbon noted, "it became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relatives the inestimable blessings he had received."*¹ Our passage contains practical teaching to help us in this duty (2Timothy 3:16).

The title in the NIV (not inspired!) calls this passage: *Jesus' first disciples*. John mentions 7 disciples in his gospel, 5 of them in this passage. The disciples (whom He named Apostles,) are listed in Matthew 10:2-3:

Simon Peter – Andrew

James – **John (the disciple Jesus loved) (sons of Zebedee)**, John 21:2)

Philip – Bartholomew (Nathanael bar Tholmai?)

Thomas – Matthew (Levi)

James the son of Alphaeus – Thaddaeus

Simon the Zealot – **Judas Iscariot**

The disciples in bold and underlined type are mentioned in John's gospel. John tells us, *One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother* (John 1:40). We suspect the one who is not named was John, who most think is also *the disciple Jesus loved* (John 13:23, 19:29, 20:2, 20:8, 21:7, 21:20).

Andrew's brother Simon was named by Jesus, Peter, which means *rock*. Peter is prominent in John as he is in the other gospels. It is Peter who says, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (John 6:68). Peter is the impulsive disciple who puts his foot in it again and again, but eventually comes good. Nathanael is found only in John, in chapter 1. Many think, and I tend to agree, that Nathanael is Bartholomew: Nathanael bar Tholmai. Significantly, Bartholomew is listed with Philip in Matthew 10.

In John 1:40-47 Andrew testifies to his brother Simon Peter and Philip testifies to his friend Nathanael. Our Christian witness begins at home (our Jerusalem – Acts 1:8,) among family, friends and neighbours, and it has always been so.

The two conversations, between Andrew and Simon, and Philip and Nathanael, follow the same pattern and run parallel to each other. This is John's way of getting his highlighter out and saying this is important! (see Appendix A). Statistics show that personal witness and friendship are the main means by which people come to Christ and are incorporated into the Christian community, the body of Christ. Research shows that new comers look for two things. First, they look at the pastor(s) and his message. Second, they look around and ask, *Is there someone here who can be my friend*. I think the pattern found in our passage backs this up.

1. **Andrew/Philip found Simon/Nathanael (John 1:41a,1:45a)**

We can feel the palpable excitement as Andrew finds his brother Simon, and Philip finds his friend Nathanael. When I first came to Christ I knew I should find someone to tell. I opted for a Christian friend,

¹ Milne, B., *The Message of John*, The Bible Speaks Today, p58

but this was not something I found easy. Andrew and Philip make it look so easy! I really had to pluck up courage. What should I do? As it happened, the next day I met him in the street!

2. Andrew and Philip testify

Both Andrew and Philip shared their joy they had found the Messiah. I said to my friend, nervously, "I've become a Christian." He looked at me and said, "What makes you think you are a Christian!" I said, "Christ lives in me." I learned something important that day: *So [I tell you] everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 10:32-33). I also testified to my family, something that didn't go down very well! My parents seemed horrified, (even though they later were happy with it.) Confessing Christ can be costly. When Virginia Woolf's friend T.S. Eliott converted to Christ, she wrote, *Then I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse would seem to me more credible than he is. I mean, there's something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God!* Confessing Christ can cost close relationships. In some cultures it costs a lot more than that (Matthew 16:24-26).

Unlike Andrew and Philip, my initial attempts at testifying to Christ did not go according to plan. But one reason was that I wasn't keeping to the script. I felt I had to explain my faith, which I wasn't equipped to do, and to preach, which I couldn't. Andrew simply said to his brother, *I've found the Messiah!* Philip just said to Nathanael, *We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.* This wasn't preaching, but testifying to a reality in their lives. We can be like the blind man in John 9, who when questioned by the Pharisees, said, *Whether he (Jesus) is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that I was blind, and now I see!* (John 9:25). We won't be able to answer many questions, but we can testify, *I've found the Messiah!* At least, this is likely to create some interest.

3. Andrew and Philip being Simon and Nathanael to Jesus

How do we bring people to Jesus? We can invite them, *Come and see!* People have to come to a place where they can hear the word of God. Therefore inviting people to a (Bible believing) church on a Sunday morning is a proper way of inviting people to *come and see*. It doesn't have to be a Sunday morning. Some are equipped to share Bible truths with family or friends. Or you could invite your friend to a Bible study, or give a Bible. Whatever the method, people need to come to hear the word of God, to hear Jesus speak.

4. Jesus sees Simon Peter coming, and Nathanael coming, and He speaks a word

We have to leave our witness with the Lord, to do what we can't do. In fact, Andrew and Philip, in their enthusiasm saying, might have forgotten that actually it was Jesus who first found them, not the other way round (see John 1:43 and John 6:44).

Jesus sees both Simon and Nathanael coming towards Him. Like the Father in the parable of the prodigal son, when we take our first steps towards God, he sees us coming from afar. In both situations Jesus has an intimate knowledge of Simon and Nathanael. He sees Peter as a future leader and rock in His church and Nathanael, as a sincere seeker after the truth. Unlike the Jews (Judeans,) Nathanael is an *Israelite indeed*.

Jesus already knows all about those we testify to; He sees the heart; He sees the potential; I'd suggest he has a word for each one of us. He knows us because *by Him all things were made*. (John 1:3, Isaiah 43:1).

Appendix A

1. Andrew **found** his brother Simon Peter (1:41a)
Philip **found** his friend Nathanael (1:45a)

2. **Andrews says to** Simon Peter, "**We have found** the Messiah!" (1:41b)
Philip says to Nathanael, "**We have found** him whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph. (1:45b)

3. **Andrew brought** Simon Peter to Jesus (1:42a)
Philip says to Nathanael to "Come and see" (1:46)

4. **Jesus sees** Simon Peter coming and said ... (1:42a)
Jesus sees Nathanael coming and said ... (1:47)