

Date Preached	14-Nov-2021	Date Initiated	02-Nov-2021
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	St Andrew, All Yrs

" [You] gave such grace to your apostle Andrew
that he readily obeyed the **call** of your Son Jesus Christ "



I do not remember how, decades ago, I went from being DOUGLAS to DOUG. I know that I was always called DOUGLAS when I was a little guy—before I started kindergarten; and I also know that my mother, in particular, never really stopped calling me DOUGLAS. But somewhere along the line ... in early elementary school ... I lost the last three letters of my given name. And, in truth, for years and years, I didn't think much about it: I was perfectly fine being DOUG.

But a funny thing happened to on the way to ordination. As my priestly formation was coming to fruition ... as I increasingly perceived my journey to the collar as a 'coming home' to who I *really* was ... I began to wonder about DOUGLAS. That was the name I was born into—my parents' first gift to me, as it were: the name I was intended to go through life with. So, beginning at my diaconal ordination, I consciously re-identified myself—reclaimed my 'true' identity—as DOUGLAS. Somehow, those three additional letters helped me become more fully the person Jesus was calling me to be.

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In today's story of our patron's initial encounter with Jesus, St Andrew *also* undergoes a subtle but powerful re-identification. Andrew and his brother Simon are fishermen. While they are casting their nets into the sea, Jesus walks by. "Follow me," He tells them, and "I will make you 'fish for people.'" Actually, the Greek is more subtle. Rather than being ἀλιεῖς (fishermen), Jesus adds a few letters to Andrew and Simon's name and makes them ἀλιεῖς **ἀνθρώπων**: fishers of people. Jesus neither denigrates nor discards Andrew's prior existence, but *reorients* it ... changes its focus ... redirects Andrew's energies and talents more God-wardly. With his new name—fisher of *people*—Andrew will go on, from that Galilean seaside, all the way to Jerusalem and Calvary and the Empty Tomb ... and thence, to Greece and/or to Ukraine and southern Russia (depending on which tradition you believe) ... to share the Good News with the world.

On this patronal feast, we celebrate our identity as a parish. We lift up our name—St Andrew's—and give thanks for all that all that it has meant to parishioners ... to the Town of Kent ... to the diocese ... and to the wider world for more than two-and-a-half centuries: countless liturgies celebrated ... hundreds of babies baptized, adolescents confirmed, couples married and loved ones buried ... generations of children formed in faith ... an endless cycle of bake sales and tag sales; of food drives and raffles and concerts, to raise money for others and for our doing God's work in this world. As disciples, St Andrew's parishioners have plied their trade—we've faithfully cast and retrieved our nets—for longer than anyone now alive can remember.

But since we are 'Andrew-people,' we, too, must be prepared for Jesus to walk by one day, tack a few extra letters onto our name and re-identify us ... reorient our work toward even greater

good than we've already accomplished. And the good news, my friends, is that Jesus *is* walking the banks of the Housatonic today just as surely as He once walked the shores of the Galilee:

- On the one hand, He is afoot in the deep despair and anxiety bred by toxic consumerism and unabating 'culture wars' ... exacerbated, of late, by the uncertainties of a wily, stalwart pandemic
 - And Jesus is afoot, too, in a society that has turned its back on mainline religion ... but, in the main, has found nothing spiritually sustaining to replace it
- On the other hand, Jesus is afoot in the rather sudden and unexpected influx of new residents who have made Kent their home ... and now seek sources of depth and meaning for their new lives here
 - And He's afoot in the new era that's dawning in our parish, with new members, new programs, new ideas and renewed energy

With Jesus walking in our midst, we Andrew-people know what to ask next: "How is He re-identifying us?" Well, just as Jesus tacked a few letters onto Andrew's name and made him a "fisher *of people*" ... we're beginning to discern some extra letters Jesus is tacking onto *our* name, too.

- First, He's calling us to be fishers *of young people*. We know the responsibility we have to pass the faith along to the generations coming up in this world. We've also candidly acknowledged that we, as a parish, no longer have the capacity to do this by ourselves. So, we've begun thinking about 'catching' families with children and youth by hiring a part-time Christian educator who will help us dream and plan a robust formation program that both fires children's spiritual imaginations and helps busy families make church part of their lives.
- Second, Jesus is calling us to be fishers *of community*. There are scores of folks in and around Kent—newcomers and long-timers alike—who are looking for what sociologists call a "third place": somewhere, in addition to home and work, where they feel they belong; a comfortable, familiar place to meet new people and experience renewal and affirmation.* The institutional Church labels them "spiritual but not religious," but we seek to call them friends.
By offering a variety of programs and meals and activities ... that appeal to a range of ages, identities and interests ... we hope to give such folks a 'soft introduction' to St Andrew's: who we are and what we do. Some may quickly join us in worship, as well. And many won't. But that's OK: We'll speak Jesus' love and grace to them over spaghetti in the Parish Hall ... or at a cornhole tournament on the lawn ... or a poetry reading or jazz concert in the Nave ... as fluently as we do in our liturgy.
- Third, Jesus is calling us to be fishers *of those who need help*. Right here in Kent, and from Waterbury to Torrington, are all manner of people with all sorts of unmet needs:

* See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_place.

for food, clothing, transportation, shelter, education, resettlement, literacy, employment, training, chores, companionship—the list is literally endless. And right here at St Andrew's, we have a *wealth* of people whose skills, interests and passions can help meet those needs. So, decked out in St Andrew's shirts and caps and aprons, we are going to partner with existing programs and agencies to go out and meet some of these needs: to share Jesus' love and care with our neighbors by giving them real, tangible assistance. We may never know how our care moves their hearts and stirs their souls ... but God surely will.

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Across our diocese, with our bishops' encouragement, parishes are **trying on** new identities—*re*-identities—new names, if you will. We're placing less emphasis on outdated metrics of how many and how much a parish attracts *to* itself (things like attendance statistics and financial reports) ... and much more on the work of going out to discover what God is already doing in the lives of people whom we've *never* attracted—and then discerning how we can help God do it.

By doing this we will, of course—with God's help, attract new members ... increase participation ... baptize, confirm and receive more believers. But as Andrew-people, we're called to be fishers of *whoever's* name Jesus tacks onto our own. He called our patron to be a fisher of people, and, right now, He's calling us to be fishers of young people; of community; and of those in need. So, let's get used to these new letters in *our* name; let's follow them into whatever new opportunities and contexts they may lead us to; and let **us** have faith that in accepting Christ's invitation to follow Him, we, like Andrew, will live into a fuller and even more wonderful identity as a parish family than we'd ever imagined possible.



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