

THE ANDREW CLASS

Next week, for better or for worse, we'll be back to our Colossians study. In the meantime, I have one more class in answer to some of the questions about the connection between Jesus and Paul. Not that all of you had that question, but some of you did. Anyway, I need to pray.

Gracious and patient Lord ... some days, like today, I think it would be wonderful if I could become gracious and patient too. But considering the likelihood, it's better if I just keep praying to be more faithful and attentive to your will. In the meantime, thank you for those who are part of *The New Church*, and also for those who are interested because they also wonder about being more faithful to you. There are so many strange dimensions to the life you have set us in – problems and possibilities galore – and we often do not know if we are helping, or hindering; understanding, or far off the mark. What we *do* know is that we are eager for your presence, and grateful for your love. In Jesus the Christ, our Savior and Lord, we pray. Amen.

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I call this “The Andrew Class.” Who was Peter’s brother? That’s right! Andrew. And what do you know about Andrew? I mean, off the top of your head.

There were the famous brothers, James and John (sons of thunder). James was the first of the twelve apostles to die, and John the last. The other famous brothers were Peter and Andrew. The four were friends, fishermen together, disciples of John the Baptist before they became disciples of Jesus. John told Andrew about Jesus. Andrew told Peter about Jesus. What do you know beyond that?

- Andrew was chosen as one of the twelve. (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14)
- At the feeding of the five thousand, Andrew told Jesus about the lad with the loaves and fishes. (John 6:8-8)
- Andrew introduced Jesus to some Greeks who wanted to see Him. (John 12:20-22)

- Along with Peter, James, and John, Andrew wanted to know more about what Jesus had said about the destruction of the temple. (Mark 13:3-41) [“I missed that. Would you please repeat it?”]
- After the Resurrection, Andrew was with the other disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem. (Acts 1:13 – that is, we don’t know this from the Gospels, we know this from Luke, who wrote Acts.)

There are also some traditions. Most traditions cannot be traced to historical facts; they are somewhere between rumor, hearsay, and gossip. Andrew supposedly founded a church in Constantinople. Later, because he refused to sacrifice to pagan gods, he was lashed and crucified at the order of the enraged Aegeas (proconsul of Patrae, in Achaia). To make his death take longer, he was tied instead of nailed to a specially shaped cross (X), now known as St. Andrew’s cross. And there is an apocryphal book called the Acts of Andrew.

I doubt if most of you knew even that much about Andrew, and that’s about all anybody knows about Andrew. What I know about Andrew is that he was like some of the church members I have known: he almost never showed up; he was seldom around. Maybe in reality he was a terrific follower among the twelve, but the record doesn’t tell us that. “Peter, James, and John” are mentioned over and over: at the Mount of Transfiguration; praying at the Garden of Gethsemane; Jesus took the three with Him into important situations – healings, confrontations, temptations, struggles, and trials. But Andrew is mostly conspicuous by his absence. The only important thing Andrew did, that we know about, was bring Peter to Jesus. Well, that turns out to be very important, but where did Andrew go? Was he usually home watching TV or out playing golf?

So what do we know about *Jesus* because of Andrew? There is a lot that we don’t know, but, according to the information we do have, there is absolutely nothing that we know about Jesus because of Andrew.

Now let me ask: What do you know about Luke? Of course, it would take many pages and many classes (some classes which you are likely to get, if you stick around) to tell some of the things we know about Luke. But just for reminders: Luke met Paul in Troas, on the second missionary journey. Paul and Silas had walked clear across Turkey, trying to

figure out where the Spirit wanted them to go. Finally they ran out of land and came to the little port town of Troas on the shores of the Aegean Sea. There they met Luke, who persuaded them to take a ship for Macedonia. Luke went with them to Philippi, where they met Lydia, and founded the most loving and supportive church of Paul's entire career. I suspect that Luke lived in Philippi, and I have always wondered if he already knew Lydia, and if the relationship between the two of them was why the church at Philippi was so effective and supportive. But never mind; I don't want to start sounding like a Dan Brown.

But I will ask the question again: What do you know about Jesus because of Luke?

How would you compare Jesus' disciple, Andrew, with Paul's disciple, Luke? I know, I know; badly framed on all counts. First of all, any disciple of Paul's was a disciple of Jesus. Paul's gratitude and love and loyalty for Jesus were beyond all words to describe. All of Paul's friendships were grounded in the love and presence of Jesus. Many of them were powerful friendships, to be sure. How many friends do you have that would walk clear across Turkey with you and on into Macedonia, braving weather, hardship, brigands, prison, and persecution, not to mention taking three years out of their lives to do it? To be sure, Silas was really in it for Jesus. But on the side, he must have had considerable trust and love for Paul. And in recent classes we were remembering some of the impact of Paul's friendship for Philemon and Onesimus and Tychicus. Jesus was at the center of those friendships too. Yet Paul was the catalyst in the immediate circumstances.

Paul lost his friendship with Mark, yet they put it back together again. If we know anything about life, that has to be impressive. Who did we say put it back together again? I suspect that the bond between Paul and Luke was one of the great friendships of all time. The evidence of it is in the New Testament, yet the focus is so much on the Risen Jesus (as it should be) that we never hear about the bond between Paul and Luke directly. We have to dig it out ourselves. From the tail end of the third missionary journey to the death of Paul (which we cannot date with any accuracy because nobody tells us what happened), how many years passed? My guess is eight years. Where was Luke for these eight years? Right beside Paul – through riots in Paul's honor, house arrest, one of the scariest storms and shipwrecks we ever hear about, and the upcoming trial before the Emperor (Nero). And since both voices (Paul's and Luke's)

went silent at the same time, what am I to think? I think Luke spent the last eight years of his life, and his death, with Paul because he knew nobody who was serving Jesus the Christ with more focus and devotion.

What do you know about Jesus because of Luke? Well, Luke knew Jesus because of Paul (and then because of meeting and knowing some of Paul's friends, some of whom had also known Jesus). But around eighty percent of what you know about Jesus, you have learned from Luke – not Andrew, or even Peter. Luke started off knowing both sides of the Jesus story: before and after; the earthly ministry and the Resurrection; Pentecost and the Damascus Road. What kind of impact did that have on how Luke told the story? Some people try to mock that. Let them. Those of us who have encountered the Risen One – and want to follow Him – are very grateful for it.

“Well,” you might remind me, “Luke learned the foundations of what he knew about Jesus’ earthly ministry from Mark.” Thanks for mentioning that. And would Mark ever have written his Gospel if it had not been for Paul? That’s another story, and we don’t have time for it right now. But I doubt it.

What am I talking about? Or maybe more to the point: *Why* am I talking about such things? Because of some of your comments and questions from our class two weeks ago (that maybe some of you have nearly forgotten by now). In essence, you were saying: “Why do we talk about Paul? Why don’t we forget Paul and talk more about Jesus?” It is a common and interesting perspective. I know that up until now, it’s not entirely your fault that you have and perpetuate this perspective. But from now on, it *will* be your fault if you have and perpetuate this perspective. So I am attempting to answer some of your questions.

If it had not been for Paul, we would know very little about Jesus. If it had not been for Paul, even if you know about the “front end” of Christianity – some of the incidents, stories, and teaching of Jesus’ ministry – you would not know anything about what makes Christianity what it is: an ongoing Faith and WAY of Life for all the ages. That is, you would know, if you knew anything at all, about an interesting man who lived two thousand years ago. Some of you like museums. Ancient history is fascinating to some of us. Caves and pyramids intrigue us, and learning about Tutankhamun or Sargon or Alexander the Great really can be gripping – for a few days or a few weeks. You go to the Getty and

come home happy for such an interesting day. But you do not go every Sunday for years, or pray to the Holy Spirit of Sargon every day, or seek the meaning of your own life and purpose and identity in a living relationship with Alexander the Great that lights your life, guides your steps, and carries you through all the trials, heartaches, challenges, and despair that come to every person who is born on this planet.

Well, the Jesus story apart from the Resurrection and Pentecost is just a museum piece. If we end up unable to separate the earthly Jesus from the presence of His Holy Spirit, then that is wonderful indeed. That is an ongoing, living relationship with the Christ of God that does indeed guide, change, and inspire everything we know about life. And it leads us into a New Life on a daily basis. The truth is, I have never in my entire life prayed to Paul. I have never been confused about whether Paul or Jesus is my Lord or my Savior. But that does not prevent me from having some appreciation, regard, respect, and gratitude for Paul. Jesus is the Great One.

But if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear, does it still make a noise? Paul is the one who heard it, and who tells us about the noise. If it had not been for Paul, we would know next to nothing about Jesus – nothing about how Jesus is still alive and present among us. All over the landscape today, there are hundreds of thousands among us who *still* don't know that Jesus is alive or present among us. Some of them even live under the banners of Christianity and belong to churches as members in good standing. Some of them pastor churches, teach in seminaries, and write books about the Bible, Christianity, and church history, and how gnosticism should have become mainline Christianity. But these are all sideshows. What matters is that some people still carry the Message and live the WAY. Those two go together because the Message is that we *can* live the WAY. Specifically, we are all invited to know and follow the Holy Spirit of the Resurrected Jesus. That requires a delightful but continual willingness on our part to get out of the driver's seat and let the Holy Spirit direct and control our choices, our direction, our purposes, and yes, our methods.

At this point, Jesus, unlike many of His followers, always insists and sets it up so that we each make our own responses. Jesus never coerces or forces anyone to follow Him. He always and only *invites* us. Well, I am not in it for any of the sideshows; I want to live the Life that Jesus invites us into, and that is not possible unless I know Him, and

follow Him. But like you, I live in a world full of thousands of distractions. I have been to the Getty, and I go to the museum pieces that surround Christianity. But at the end of the day, all I really care about is: Do I know Him, and follow Him?

There are endless distractions, and some of them are being consciously designed, timed, and put in our path by Satan. It is imperative to know this, and to have disciplines and reminders that help me keep my eye on the ball – or in this case, keep my eyes on Jesus. And there are lots of incredible followers who give us hints, experiences, and inspiration that help us keep focused on the WAY – Luther, Wycliffe, Origen, John Cotton, and so on. But of all the followers I have known about over all the years, none of them are as helpful to me as the Apostle Paul. I am not the only one who realizes this; the canon of the New Testament recognizes this, and preserves it for all the followers to come. Thanks be to God.

Anyway, I wanted to interrupt our Colossians classes to make this as clear as I could. One of the biggest issues in the entire Old Testament is idolatry: taking your eyes off the real God. This bends our steps toward the false goals and purposes that distract us from the real God. God isn't jealous because of God's vanity; God knows that false gods lead us astray – squander our lives, our resources, our efforts – and ultimately destroy us.

Idolatry in the New Testament is taking our eyes off Jesus. But first we have to get our eyes *on* Jesus – on the One who leads us not just to Jerusalem, but to the true and unseen Kingdom of His Father, which is already here, yet is also endless realms beyond us, and forever. In other words, not just the Jesus of Nazareth and Galilee, but the Jesus of Resurrection and Pentecost – who still comes to us, changes us, and leads us into New Life with Him, and with each other.

In *The New Church*, we need to take pruning far more seriously – far more to heart – than most Christians ever do. In *The New Church*, we will want to take distractions more seriously – far more to heart – than most Christians and most churches ever do. Satan has many tricks up his sleeve. At first glance, some of them seem mild, almost friendly. But Satan's purpose is to throw us off track. It doesn't have to be a big and ugly temptation; it only has to throw us off track. That's enough to ruin our service and our relationship to Jesus and His Kingdom. More and more I am convinced that Satan's favorite temptation – his number-one ploy in our time – is distraction.

Look around you. People are going nuts with what they are trying to keep up with; with what they expect of themselves; even with how much they want to know, how many places they want to go, how many books they want to read, how many friends they want to help, and on, and on, and on.

I think we sang the great hymn just a week or so ago: “and let our ordered lives confess, the beauty of His mayhem.” Is that how it goes?

Do you imagine that I am suggesting that we can take care of any of these distractions, temptations, or disciplines by our own wisdom or willpower? You are used to hearing that from many sources, but I do not believe it. I do remember, at least in my right mind, that Jesus is our Savior – that it is Jesus who can save us. But we can help make that easier for Him, if we pay attention to Him, if we keep our eyes on Him, if we truly want to follow and obey Him.

Of course the fleshpots of Egypt (or Newport Beach, Port Townsend, or Milwaukee) really are very appealing.

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How well does Paul know Jesus and His teachings? We only have hints, because we never hear Paul preaching or teaching in his letters like he would have in person. (The sermon at Athens may be a partial exception, but that was a special case, and a dud besides.) I am convinced that the impact of Jesus’ life on Paul is not only huge, but beyond our tracking. That is, some of it is not provable by pointing to Scripture passages that clearly connect something Jesus said with something Paul is writing. I do hope and claim that Jesus’ influence in *my* life is far greater than anything you could prove by quoting sayings from the Gospels. And I hope that is true in your life as well. In Paul’s case, it is actually more complicated because Paul is writing his letters before the Gospels have been written. Therefore, he is never quoting the Gospels as we know them because they are not yet in the form that we know them. But the Gospel writers, at least in some cases, do know Paul and/or his writings. This is particularly obvious with Luke and Mark and, in a different way, with John.

So when Paul says something like, “*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*” (I Corinthians 6:19), we don’t have any direct quote from Jesus to show that Paul got this from Jesus. But can you imagine trying to convince me that Paul did not get this from his *relationship* with Jesus?

For the moment, and in answer to the questions some of you have raised, let’s confine ourselves to more obvious and provable connections between what Jesus said and what Paul is saying. Please don’t stay on this meager level, but now you may find it interesting.

“*To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*” (I Corinthians 7:10-11) Clearly Paul is revealing here that he knows what Jesus taught about marriage and divorce. It is not what Paul would have thought or taught because of his own rabbinical training. So I would call this hard-core proof that Paul knows and pays more attention to the teachings of Jesus than some people give him credit for.

“*To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.*” (I Corinthians 7:12) Paul goes on to give his opinion about various circumstances that Christians are facing in their lives, things that Jesus did not directly cover in His teachings. But don’t you find it interesting that Paul makes it very clear that this is his best opinion, and not something he got from Jesus?

That’s not the only time Paul is so rigidly honest. “*Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.*” (I Corinthians 7:25) Paul then goes on to state his own best opinion of the matter. He is pretty careful not to mislead if he can help it. So, how many times does Paul give his opinion or advice without caring what Jesus thought or taught? More than one answer might be given to this question, but you can probably guess what mine would be.

“*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the*

cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (I Corinthians 11:23-26) This is Paul's account of the Last Supper. Interesting that his words are more familiar than any of the words in the Gospel accounts, and they are used in the liturgy of our communion meals far more frequently than any others. Paul would have had to get this account from other disciples, but it still shows that he was doing so.

Jesus says, *"Do not give dogs what is holy."* (Matthew 7:6) Paul writes, *"Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh [i.e., circumcise people]."* (Philippians 3:2) Maybe no connection. But are you sure?

"Our Lord said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35) Luke is quoting Paul, who is quoting Jesus. (Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, on the way to Jerusalem for his last time.) We do not have this saying from Jesus recorded anywhere else.

This is not the end of it. I keep running into comments Paul makes that remind me he is paying more attention to what Jesus has taught than we normally realize. I will start keeping a list, and hope you will too.