

Apprenticeship

John 1: 29-42

I think most of you know that I like to sing. Music has been a part of my life since my first piano lesson at the start of 3rd grade, and then in elementary orchestra and choir in 4th grade. Singing has been a central part of my life every single year since. I think God has blessed me with this gift of music; which is to say, it was not a skill I was born with. It was something I was taught. In my youngest days I remember sitting next to our old stereo about the size of our couch and listening to my mother's Mario Lanza records over and over again, particularly Romberg's The Student Prince. When I was in the junior high choir I heard for the first time the unbelievable voices of 2 great operatic tenors – Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo, and I wanted to sing like them! But, as fate would have it, I do not have the vocal cords of a tenor; rather, I am a baritone. So, I soon started listening to the greatest baritone voice of that era, and arguably the greatest of all time, the famed Verdi baritone Sherrill Milnes. And then I discovered that my choir teacher, while doing his Master's work, actually sang in a quartet at Indiana University with none other than Sherrill Milnes. They had the same voice teacher, Hermanus Barre, and when I listen to recordings, I can hear the clear similarities in their vocal technique. My teacher had always wanted me to study voice, and in 10th grade, I took my first lesson. And the rest is kind of history. My voice teacher, Dr Les Hale, taught me more about music and the joy of singing than any other person in my life, and for that gift I will always be grateful. Because of their past friendship and work together, I was able to

meet with Sherrill Milnes when the Met was on tour in Minneapolis, and when he gave recitals in the off season down in Des Moines as he returned to his undergrad school, Drake University. Our work and sharing together was admittedly brief, but I felt like I had died and gone to heaven – to get the chance to work and speak with Sherrill Milnes! So, from a young boy who wanted to sing like Mario Lanza, to a young man who had the opportunity to work with one of the greatest voice teachers I’ve ever known, to the chance to connect with one of the greatest opera singers of all time – well, I’ve had some of the greatest teaching a person could ever ask for.

Much like I wanted to sing, Andrew wanted to learn about God. So, he started following a hair-shirted man named John the Baptizer, and became his student. And then, much like my teacher gave me the opportunity to connect with Sherrill Milnes, John pointed Andrew to the man named Jesus; John declared him to be the Lamb of God, the Son of God – he was the best there would ever be. Andrew was so excited that he went and got his brother, Simon, and told him to “*come and see.*” Together, these brothers went off on the greatest adventure ever in human history; an adventure about which stories are still told to this day as we do here week after week. Jesus told these two men to come and join him where he was staying. It’s a good start for any novice to get an invitation to hang with the greatest teacher of them all, and to have the chance to learn the skills that change lives. Andrew and Simon seize the opportunity. It is clear from the story that these brothers knew what they wanted. They wanted to see and know God. They wanted

to see the Messiah. They knew with whom they wished to apprentice. John was wonderful, but they wanted to be students of the great Rabbi, Jesus. There is an old saying which states, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” Well, Andrew and Simon were ready. But it raises the challenging question for us today, “Are we ready? Are we truly ready to follow Jesus, to go where he would have us go, and to learn what he would seek to teach us?”

“Come and see Mom and Dad!!” How joyfully and spontaneously a child interrupts a parent with the urgent invitation to come and see. With delight, we go and see the child’s new creation – a drawing, a sandcastle, a house built with Legos. We shower them with words of praise as they show us how they can balance on their bicycle, master their first piece on the piano, or pour their own orange juice without spilling all over the counter.

“Come and see Mom and Dad!” Why does that simple, clear invitation of an excited child become so disturbing and so difficult for us to extend as adults? When was the last time any of us, with any sense of real urgency or excitement, issued the invitation to a friend or family member to come to church, let alone “come and see” Jesus?

It is important for us today, just as it was for Andrew and Simon, to follow Jesus as a student follows a master. It is this mentor-disciple relationship that will help us become the servants of God we are called and intended to be. We know that a disciple, an apprentice, learns by watching and repeating what they see. Jesus teaches the brothers to

imitate him; that is what a good Rabbi, a good teacher does. A good Rabbi teaches by example, by explanation, by allowing for mistakes, by giving correction, and by passing on the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed. And if we read the gospel accounts, that is exactly what Jesus did. In Rabbinical Judaism, the whole purpose of being a particular Rabbi's disciple was to be trained so well that anyone who was watching might see the hand of the Rabbi, or hear his words or his phrasing in your speech, or witness the wisdom or compassion of the Rabbi in your actions. The teacher's skill is passed to the student, master to apprentice, on into the next generation. I was taught by Les Hale, who sang with Sherrill Milnes, and who both studied with Hermanas Barre. Jesus taught Andrew and Simon Peter, who passed on the faith which has now come to us. During my college days when I was really doing a lot of singing, students at my own university, as well as those throughout the Midwest who heard me at regional vocal competitions, would listen to me and say, "He must be a student of Les Hale." You could tell who my teacher was by the way that I sang. Would people today know who your teacher is? When we go out into the work-a-day world, when we are in the store, at school, walking around River Prairie or the Farmer's Market, or sitting on the family couch, do people see the great Rabbi, Jesus, working through us?

Andrew and Peter asked Jesus "where he was staying" because they wanted to "come and see." If we want to be apprentices of Jesus, if we truly want to live and serve as the people Christ has called us to be, then we, too, must be willing to go where Jesus is

staying. I remember Dr Hale telling me how each Saturday, for over 2 years, he used to drive 4 hours to get to his voice lesson with Hermanus Barre. He took a 2-hour lesson, and then had to drive 4 hours back home. That is where his teacher was, in Chicago, and so he went to where he was to learn. Because Jesus lives where the poor are, we need to be the people who will volunteer to sort and distribute food at Feed My People, and serve the meals at Community Table, because that is where we will find Jesus. Jesus lives where the children are, because we are told they are special people in the Kingdom of God. They need teachers and leaders and mentors who will spend time with them; and while in their midst, we can find Jesus. Jesus lives with those who have no one to love them or care for them; so, when we dare to love the unlovable, when we care for the lonely and the outcast, we walk next to Jesus, and we can learn from him. Jesus was a Rabbi, a teacher; so, he was frequently in the Temple to worship and teach. When we gather weekly for worship and study, we can find Jesus, and learn to follow him more faithfully. You see, discipleship isn't something that comes prepackaged, purchased with free shipping from Amazon. While I have many books on singing techniques, and boxes and boxes of musical scores, I couldn't learn to sing from a book. Dr. Hale taught me how to sing. You can't learn to sky dive, to play the piano, to paint, to play basketball, or anything else just from reading an instruction manual. As valuable and important as the Bible is to our faith journey, we have to do more than read it. We must read it and then DO it by walking with Jesus. We must learn from our teacher, and then walk in his steps. Andrew invites each of us, including you, and including me, to "come and see." May we

all be like a young child, eager to learn and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Come and see, dear friends. Come and see. Amen.

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