

## **“We have found the Messiah!”**

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“We have found the Messiah!” Just imagine that statement, that conversation between Andrew and his brother Simon Peter. “We have found the Messiah!” I’m sure at first it must have sounded outlandish, even crazy. But something in Andrew’s voice, in his eyes, something in his manner must have convinced Peter that what he said was true. Because John next tells us that he brought Peter to Jesus. Peter allowed himself to be brought to Jesus. But the reason Andrew was so convincing, the reason Peter believed him, is that Andrew had first entered into a very important dialogue, an encounter that John recounts right at the beginning of his Gospel. It was an encounter that changed him, and that has changed many others as well, including ourselves. In fact, this is a conversation, an encounter that includes us all. Every single one of us, in one way or another, fits into this dialogue with Jesus.

John shares just a few details about this meeting, this conversation, but he tells us a lot about our own discipleship. John the Baptist pointed Andrew and his companion (probably John himself) toward Jesus, and they follow after him. First, Jesus turned and spoke to them. They were following at a distance, but he opened the door for them to enter in. This is a divine initiative. It is always God who takes the first step towards us. Just as Christ called Andrew, and Peter, and John, he now calls out to us. So when the mind begins to seek and the heart begins to long, God turns to us, he addresses us, and he meets us. That longing is placed there by him, by his Spirit. St. Augustine said, “We could not even have begun to seek for God unless he had already found us.”

So Jesus speaks first, and asks them, “What are you looking for?” Were they zealots, thinking he would be some kind of revolutionary? Were they just puzzled? Or, were they really looking for God? Jesus asks us the same question, and we should ask ourselves, “What am I looking for?” Am I seeking a God who will fit into my plans and do things my way? Or, am I truly looking for God’s will and his plan for me?

They answer Jesus with a question: “Where are you staying?” They don’t just speak to him on the road in passing. They wished to linger with him, to talk things out. They wish to know him! A disciple of Jesus can never be satisfied with just a passing word. He wants to meet Jesus, to know him, and not just as an acquaintance, but as a friend, even as master and lord, as the beloved. A disciple of Jesus wants to stay with him, to abide in his presence, to be where he is.

And so, Jesus says, "Come, and you will see." Rabbis would often invite followers and questioners to come and talk, to think about the answers together. But Jesus invited them not only to come and talk. He invited them to come and stay, to be with him, and to discover things that only he could reveal to them.

"And," John tells us, "they stayed with him." Jesus welcomed them in, allowed them to share in his life. They remained, they took up with Jesus and entrusted themselves to him. They took the risk of knowing him, and thus knowing themselves too, as God knows them. In the same way, Jesus invites and challenges us to come and stay with him, to abide with him, not just to pass him on the road with a casual word, but to really enter into a deeper relationship with him.

Aren't the choices of God amazing? He could have called some of the scribes of Jerusalem, or Roman centurions then in Palestine, or some of the many philosophers in Greece to be his companions or messengers. But he did not. Those whom he chose to carry his message to the world were not chosen because of their ingenuity or education or social standing. He chose simple fishermen, those who would most completely reflect God's power. They had so little to claim as their own; only God working through them could accomplish what he has done!

And the same is true today. He calls each one of us here to be his companion on the way. He invites us to spend time in his company, to be silent with him, to hear his words, to absorb the reality of his many works, and then to go and share with others what we ourselves have received. "We have found the Messiah!" He does not call us because we are brilliant, or charming, or highly educated, or rich, or powerful. He calls us because he loves us. From all eternity, he has known you and me, by name. From all eternity, he has planned for each one of us to be in his company, to be among his disciples, and even to be his co-workers, his witnesses and heralds to the world. He sees not only what we are, but what we can be. As he looks at Peter, he sees not just a fisherman, but a disciple, an apostle, a missionary for his Kingdom, the one who would be the rock for his companions.

We have been chosen just as surely as were those men who left John the Baptist to become apostles of Christ. With Andrew we can say, "We have found the Messiah." That's our mission! Like Andrew and John, we've been introduced to Jesus and have spent time with him, and now we want others to know him too, to experience his love and his call to intimacy. That is why we're here: he has called us, he invites us to abide in his presence, to rest in his love, and he sends us to others. But it always begins with him, it always depends on simply being with him and allowing him to work through us. It all must begin with this very personal encounter, this simple conversation, this dialogue of love. Only then will anyone believe that we too have found the Messiah.

We are blessed today to celebrate a perfect example of this kind of discipleship: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Elizabeth Seton is the first American born saint and a truly remarkable woman. She was born just as the American Revolution was about to begin. She came from a devout Episcopalian family, and had a happy family life. But during her husband's illness with tuberculosis, they went to Italy, and it was there that she first encountered the Catholic faith. She was especially fascinated by devotion to our Lord in the Eucharist. She experienced intimacy

with Jesus in a way she had never known before, and after her husband's death, she resolved to become a Catholic. It was almost as if she asked that same question of Jesus: Where are you staying? And he replied: Come and see. Eventually she also felt the call to become a religious and an educator. She gathered together a group of like-minded women, the first new religious order started in the United States. She taught children, but she formed their families too, and became a great apostle in our still very young country. Thirty years after her death, Archbishop Kenrick said, "Elizabeth Seton did more for the Church in America than all of us bishops together."

We shouldn't imagine that Elizabeth Ann had an easy time of it. Like all the great disciples of Jesus, she faced enormous struggles along the way, but she always persevered. When things didn't go her way, she did not despair or withdraw from the public square, and she never forgot the power of faith to move mountains. She knew that no power on earth could defeat the Holy Spirit, and she never allowed the surrounding culture to shake her. She put her full faith and trust in her Savior, and she kept moving forward. She said: "When so rich a harvest is before us why do we not gather it in? All is in our hands if we will but use it." Dear friends, just as he called Elizabeth Ann Seton, and Andrew and Peter and John, so now our Lord calls us. He invites us to abide in his presence, he speaks to our hearts if we will but listen, he forms us, and he sends us out to tell others, "We have found the Messiah."