

Epiphany 3A -- Luke 5:1-11

“**Tell, Show, Do**” - Rev. Seth D. Jones

Epiphany is a God-inspired understanding or appearance which immediately deepens our relationship with God.

It is an awakening, in the truest sense of the word.

We awaken to God’s presence in our lives and the world.

In today’s reading, we see another awakening:

Peter, James and John’s spectacular catch of fish at the command of Jesus;

An awakening to what God through Christ **tells** us,

what God **shows** us through the disciples, and what we are asked to **do**.

The primary impact of an Epiphany, an awakening, is the witness and testimony of that experience to others.

For those of us who have had an epiphany, an awakening, there is no meaning in the experience until it is told to another person, until we testify to what we have witnessed.

Those are loaded words –

“testify” and “witness”.

They are not so loaded, though, when we understand, an epiphany is a personal witnessing of the presence of the Lord in one’s life.

It is really hard to know, especially in the culture we live in,

how to testify to our witness and awakening to the presence of God in our lives without being labeled as

crazy,

kooky or

weird.

I think part of what Jesus is doing in our reading for today is showing us how it is done and why. He is teaching.

Jesus uses a traditional teaching method which **tells** people what is being taught,

then **shows** them what is being taught and

then charges them with the ability to **do it** on their own.

We can call it the “tell, show and do” method.

Let’s see how Jesus does this in our story today.

When the Bible does not tell us what the words of the teaching were, as in today,

the teaching is expressed in what is done right after the teaching.

We don’t need the words of Jesus’ sermon from the boat because we are being shown the

sermon. Jesus’ teaching must have been pretty important because he felt the need to project and be seen by everyone on shore,

so he gets into Simon Peter’s boat and teaches from there.

When he finished preaching, Jesus tells Peter to let down the fishing nets, which Peter and his crew have been doing all night with no success.

It seems to me there is a broad middle ground which constitutes success in fishing.

On one extreme is the night Peter has just had:

“We worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.”

On the other extreme is what happens next.

The catch is so large the nets begin to break and tear and once the haul is lifted onto the boat, it is so heavy the boat begins to swamp.

Neither outcome is particularly favorable.

If you catch no fish, you have no money to support your family.

If you catch too many, you have a momentary flash of glory before your boat sinks under the weight of fish –

a little bit like the situation in *The Perfect Storm* movie.

From what we see here,

I think Jesus’ teaching to the people on the shore had something to do with the provision of God and how Jesus is the embodiment, the flesh and blood example of that provision.

This is what Peter sees as well.

In the face of the provision of God,
in the face of God’s love and desire to help,
we see how far short we fall from what God wishes us to be.

We would rather have God go away,
than have God’s presence constantly remind us of our shortcomings.

Look at what Peter says in Luke 5:8

“Go away from me, Lord”

It is a fearful condition to be faced with the love and power of God.

Jesus tells the people these things,
and then he shows the disciples what he means by manifesting a huge haul of fish.

Jesus sees Peter’s fear,

And tells him,

*“Do not be afraid;
from now on you will be catching people.”*

...as if that might help Peter’s fear.

Jesus **tells** the disciples and the crowd about his provision, then he **shows** them the extent of that provision

and he asks the new disciples **to do** what he has shown.

They agree without hesitation.

Whatever Jesus taught,

then showed them
and then asked of them
seemed too good to pass up.

They left everything.

They had an epiphany, an awakening, a God-inspired experience which immediately deepened their relationship with God.

In all the Gospels, the disciples are told, in one way or another, to spread the Good News.

Luke, though, is very deliberate about how that Good News spreads.

Luke **tells** us what the Prophets,

the wise ones from the East,
the Rabbis,
John the Baptist
and those in the temples
said and tell us about Jesus.
Then he **shows** us what Jesus did.
Then in Acts Luke shows us how the disciples **do** what Jesus showed to them.

The reason this is an effective method of teaching Godly things
is because anyone can tell us anything, and there are people who are paid very well to do
precisely that.

But then they have to show us they can do what they tell.

The hurdle gets a little higher with that demand.

If what, for instance, Jesus tells us is also shown in what Jesus does,
then we can have some confirmation which suggests
Jesus may actually be who he says he is
and knows what he is talking about.

Many people are content with just these levels of epiphany,
of knowing God's action in the world.

The problem with stopping there is now we are completely reliant on simply what we
have been told and what we have been shown.

People sometimes prefer to be told what to think
and let someone else do the rest.

The power of our God-given souls and faith is only activated, however,
when we make the final step,
when we make the effort of will,
and follow the call,

drop everything
and seek to do as Christ did.

This does not mean we are Christ.

Nor does it necessarily mean we can do what Christ did.

What it does mean, however, is that we are vessels who are awakened to the work Christ and the
Holy Spirit wish to do in the world.

One way of expressing how Jesus' model of **tell, show, do** works is testifying,
To be a witness to what God has done in his life
and in the life of the church.

Jesus speaks not just to individuals, but to a whole church.

Jesus does not catch **A** fish –

he catches a huge haul of fish.

We do this learning together.

We do this following together.

We do this work of God together.

And even having said that, we don't do it –

"It is not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor 15)
which accomplishes God's work in our community.

Now I hope I have told you what we are looking at today –

how the Lord teaches us.

And I think I have shown you, at least in Luke –
how the Lord acts with us to call us.

So the question is –
what are we called to do,
given God's work in our lives?

Well, this is the scary part.

I think we are called, based on the prophets, the disciples and Paul,
to testify to God's presence in our lives,
to be a witness to the awakening we have experienced with God.

I don't want to define too specifically what it means to testify and witness.

You can see how it breaks in the Christian culture.

On the extremes, like Simon Peter's fishing expedition,
we have on one side those who say we only testify best
by doing things rather than saying anything,

which can sort of be like a long night of unsuccessful fishing.

How can anyone know why you are doing the works of God if you do not tell people in
whose name you do these things for others?

On the other side are those who say we can only tell people about God and testify to them.

This is all they need and if they need help,
well, then they have to listen to our testimony before they receive it.

Well, if you are on the receiving end of this sort of behavior,
it is likely to swamp your fragile boat with way too much of a haul.

As with most things, the answer lies somewhere in between.

We fear telling people the source of our motivation for our work in the world,
and it is highly likely people will not ask.

But the Prophets, Luke and Paul all show us
that part of our **doing** is **showing and telling** the works of God in our lives.

We are a faith of words,

because words have power.

Words can change things,
Words can change lives.

So very quickly,

let me do what I have spoken of here and testify to you:

The man who stands before you today is not a great example of Christian faith.

God spoke God's call to me when I was 16.

You would think an experience like that would make me into a good evangelist for God,
a good candidate for the Baptists perhaps, but I am not.

My faith is easily shaken, buffeted by the winds of ideas, change, and criticism.

When Ephesians 4:14 says,

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and
blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and
craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming*

There have been times when I am the person this verse is speaking of.

I live in fear I might lose my faith again.
I know enough now to simply wait out the barren periods in my faith life rather than dumping the whole thing.

But to learn that lesson, I had to wander far outside the Christian faith, far beyond the witness in the transformative power of God through Jesus Christ.

And I won't lie to you.

I wonder sometimes

"What if I am wrong about all this."

But here is the thing:

All this religious stuff,

all this spirituality,

comes down to what we care about.

What are we willing to struggle for and with?

What, if you will allow me a moment of Calvinism, are we willing to submit to?

I think if we are honest about our spiritual journeys we will see that God finds us – we do not find God.

Most everything else constitutes a considerable amount of floundering around in a great sea of human-created ideas and beliefs.

And if you are one of those who has been fortunate enough to have had an epiphany or two in your life - an awakening -

at some point you have to give over to the source of that epiphany and follow it with your whole being.

I have had only a couple epiphanies which have been transformative.

One was my baptism at 16 years old.

Another was about 14 years ago, when I returned to the church and the Christian faith.

My epiphany at that time was two-fold –

evil is real and it exists;

and Jesus Christ does something about it.

As a kid, I had mystical experiences

and weird moments which pushed me into the world of the Spirit.

Those experiences laid the groundwork for me to be open to these awakenings in my life.

Everything else can be seen a sort of working out of those epiphanies.

So when you look at me,

you see one who, like Jonah,

has refused the call more than once.

You see one who, like Isaiah,

has doubted his worthiness for this calling.

You see one who, like Thomas,

Refuses still to trust that which I have simply been told by others.

And you see one who, like Paul before his Damascus Road epiphany,

has actively sought to break and tear down a person's faith in such a way that they have denied Christ.

Dragged back kicking and screaming,

I testify to you, with Paul, that

*“by the grace of God, I am what I am
and God’s grace toward me has not been in vain”.*

My transformation by the work of God and Jesus Christ
has not been some grand reversal in my life.

I don’t have some great rags to riches,
down-and-out to great recovery story.

All I can say is that, once I was living outside the grace and work of God
and upon having been brought back to the grace of God by God and God alone,
I am humbled and grateful for the simple transformations
and view of the world I have been granted.

For me, the simple truth of Christ’s forgiveness and love approaches the truth as I understand
it.

And by an even greater grace through the Holy Spirit,
I have been given the gift of being able to come up here every week and talk with you about God,
Christ and the Holy Spirit.

And now, as you have heard God **tell** you through His prophets and messengers,
and as you have been **shown** how your Lord and Christ
does the great and simple things of God in creation and in others,
go yourselves and **tell others, show others and do for** others what you have seen and
heard.

Amen.