

“Show and Tell”  
Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 4:16-21  
January 12, 2020

As a midwesterner preparing to move to New England, I was told by friends that I “might need a passport of the mind,” if not a real passport issued by the State Department. For it seems that whereas midwesterners will strike up conversations with perfect strangers without any need for an introduction, many New Englanders will only do so if confronted by three kinds of situations:

First of all, I was told, you are permitted to speak to perfect strangers if babies are involved. Say something gurgly to a New England infant, and then you can compliment the parents on the beauty of their child.

Secondly, something similar will work with pets, especially dogs. You can address a New England animal on a leash, and then ask the owner if it would be okay to pet it. There’s your second conversation opener.

The third only work if you encounter a member of the clergy. A pastor or priest in New England is seen as something of an instant Dear Abby, to whom you may bear your entire soul, even if you had never met that man or woman of the cloth previously.

Now this soul-bearing, it turns out, is of two kinds. The first is the general unburdening of problems and cares, and a seeking for answers. The second is a much more hostile kind of encounter that generally consists of an attack upon all organized religion, usually due to some hurt - real or imagined - encountered earlier in life at the hands of the clergy, or nuns, or some other official representative of faith.

In my own experience, this attack on religion has taken the form of characterizing faith as childish. I won’t go into the back and forth of it all for you now, but upon reflection, there is at least one area where I am willing to concede an element of the child-like nature in our faith. And that leads to my theme for this morning, the idea of “Show and Tell.”

Now most of us remember Show-and-Tell as something that happened in school, generally to get children under control and quiet down to focus on something of general interest while allowing one pupil to hold forth. And when you think of it, Show-and-Tell sounds a little like church.

Day in and day out, people are busy, going about their business, trying to make the grade, to get ahead, or at least to tread water. And then something tells them to stop for a short while, to quiet down, to have a seat, and then to listen to something different, hopefully something interesting, and to see what somebody else, whether from the pulpit, or the choir loft, or the scriptures, has to share about life, the universe, and everything.

That this is necessary is rather sad, in a way. Once upon a time it was quite common for people to talk about God and faith and the church in an everyday kind of way, not just on Sunday mornings. Maybe it's because in our New England way, we tend not to wear religion on our sleeves, nor talk about it very much for fear of making other people uncomfortable. Or maybe none of us thinks we have anything special to share with others. Or maybe we don't believe that we have anything worth mentioning - beyond the weather, or the latest bit of news, or some new Hollywood release, or what's on sale at Stop & Shop, or Walmart's, or what happened at the office.

And so if they don't show up on Sunday mornings at the Meetinghouse, they might get the impression that it's quite normal to live your life without God. That God apparently doesn't have much to say, even if God (maybe) said things a long time ago to very different kinds of people in very different circumstances for reasons that no longer exist. That if God is a God of love, then His love must be directed somewhere else. That if God is a God of goodness, He doesn't seem to put much goodness on display. There isn't that much show-and-tell from on high.

And so a lot of us pretend that we can get along rather well without the church and without whatever it is that the church is trying to bear witness to. That any improvement in our lives can be engineered by ourselves, that any better way to manage daily existence

doesn't have to come at the expense of spending an hour or two Sunday mornings away from hearth and home, and that the fellowship that comes from our common and universal search for truth, justice, and peace isn't worth the interpersonal conflicts that can result from too many of us being in the same place at the same time. For, as someone once put it, "there will always be drama in the Church." Who needs it!

And yet scripture itself reminds us that even Jesus of Nazareth showed up at His local house of worship on a weekly basis. Why did He bother? Not because He liked the minister - in fact, it was the Pharisees who ran the service, and Jesus was known to have crossed religious swords with some of them on occasion. And if Jesus complained about the hypocrites who worshipped with Him - you know the ones who came to be seen praying public, but whose lives didn't measure up - they couldn't keep Jesus away from praying with them every Sabbath. And what about the Sadducees, who led the national headquarters up in Jerusalem?

Jesus came to worship anyways, because He knew that His Lord and His God would speak to Him, and would show Him His will, in and through the act of worship. After all, that's when God appeared to the Prophet Isaiah - in the Temple. And that's what Epiphany is all about: God's self-revelation, God being shown to us, God speaking to us, God being with us. Not just a long time ago in a place far, far away - but here, now, in this place.

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Now maybe you've received circulars in the mail from investment companies, or real estate firms, or stock brokers explaining that they have news of one of the best offers you could ever latch on to. For a minimum investment of \$1k, \$5k, \$10k, or \$100k you too can get in on the fast track to financial success and security. They'll fly you to Florida, they'll serve you lunch at a fancy restaurant, they'll give you a free weekend at a ski resort in Vermont if you'll only listen to their song and dance and pay attention to their money-saving, money-making presentation. They'll do just about anything to get

you to quiet down, have a seat, and let someone get up in front of you to tell you something different, something special. Show and Tell. And then, sign on the dotted line.

Now, many of us take these brochures and very neatly drop them into the waste paper basket. We don't have the time to follow through, maybe. Perhaps we just don't want to bother, or genuinely don't want any real estate in Arkansas or Oklahoma.

Or maybe we'd love to invest, but have nothing to do it with - not enough cash. Or maybe we don't think we have the smarts to figure out which investment to make, which land to buy. And maybe we just don't want to let ourselves in to being snookered.

But that's one of the things about God's version of Show and Tell. God won't ask anything from you that you don't already have. God doesn't require anything, except what you've got already. All God wants is that chance to show you, and to tell you. If you'd only quiet down, have a seat, and listen to something different. There is no age requirement, no minimum IQ, no proof of citizenship or employment. Just a readiness and a willingness to be shown and told about one of the greatest pieces of news this world has ever heard: that God wants nothing but the best for us, and that God loves us all.

Let us pray: