

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“A Rule of Thumb”

Luke 5: 1-11

February 4, 2007

Here’s a spiritual rule of thumb for you. Really more a piece of deep wisdom that has floated through the spiritual tradition always... To see God, is to see yourself, in all your brokenness and in all your blessedness.

To see one thing clearly is to see everything... and so

When God reveals and discloses something of Himself... on the heels of that, as a consequence of that, you’ll also be having an epiphany about yourself... Got it?

So, when Isaiah has this vision in the temple... There is a moment of visionary seeing, it’s apocalyptic... something is unveiled about God. And Isaiah’s response is, **“Uh oh... I’m in big trouble. Woe is me. I am unclean.”** Got it?

When Peter gets it, that this person, Jesus, who told him about the hot spot for bass on Lake Galilee, is Lord ... he falls to his knees. **“Get away from me... I am sinful.”** It also happens with Paul on the road to Damascus... he is on his knees in fear. Got it?

So this business of Epiphany... of having something revealed isn’t typically a fun thing... not a first. It’s just real.

When the scales fall off... and we see God, it means also seeing the self. Awakening to God means awakening to the self and all that entails.

AA spirituality sort of captures this... when they begin the healing process. **“Hi, I’m Bob, and I’m an alcoholic.”** ... I suspect not an easy thing to say, at first. Awakening is typically never at first comforting... It’s just real and honest.

It’s like we’ve been walking about with some sort of darkened lenses over our eyes... and God pulls them off. And we see and **“woe are we.”** Because...

“Well... I hadn’t seen that before.

Sure didn’t know that about myself...

Wasn’t aware I was like that... played that game.”

Ever looked back in a moment of awakening and found yourself embarrassed?... It’s sort of like looking back at your high school annual. **“Can’t believe I thought that was cool.”** That’s the nature of spiritual work in the beginning.

Mostly it’s uncomfortable... Like looking back at some school annual and knowing, no matter what the title under the picture said, you were a big dork. **Summa Cum Goof Ballus.**

In the Bible, though... it’s not embarrassment that’s felt. It’s fear. They still had the ability to feel that in the face of something awesome. We don’t seem to be able to get there anymore.

Maybe it’s because we’ve shrunk the world so through microscopes and nano this or digital that. We pulled the curtain back on the Wizard and we stopped all our shaking... because we saw The Wizard’s tricks... Or so we thought.

Or maybe it’s not our technology that’s to blame but our theology. We started manhandling the Mystery. Or so we pretended.

We built gyms to worship in...

We shrunk truth to fit on bumper stickers...

We made God in our own image...

And by the time we were through God was more like Santa Claus or Mr. Rogers or a nondirective therapist... who just really wants you to know you're "Okay... just like you are."

Which isn't the gospel, by the way. You may be loved, just like you are... but it's never okay with God for you to be less than you really are... and... we are... less than we are.

And we shrink our notion of God... in order to remain less than we are. Our God isn't enough like C.S Lewis' Aslan, who is (how is it?) "good but not safe." Goodness, in our minds, can't coexist with one who might bring us to our knees... So...

.... We don't really believe that verse that says, "**The beginning of wisdom is fear of God.**" We don't really believe that. "**The Psalmist just got that wrong... got a bit carried away with the whole wrath of God thing... You know how those Old Testament types were.**"

But is the Psalmist right... Is the Bible true? In the beginning (anyway) if we've seen God and truly seen ourselves... is this going to be pleasant?

Fear is perhaps the only reaction that makes sense having seen what is real. "**Perfect love may cast out all fear**", as the New Testament teaches, but the implication is that there is some fear for perfect Love to deal with.

Perhaps until we get afraid of the real thing, we'll never be able to let go of all our little fears. See... it's not that we don't know any fear, is it? We just fear the wrong things. **The beginning of wisdom is fear of God.** That's the way it is in the beginning, anyway. If we're awakening...

In the Bible, it seems everyone's first response is fear... Pick an Epiphany in the Bible and you'll find fear. But oddly enough, most every Epiphany is also accompanied by the two words "**Fear not!**"

It's one of the most common one-liners in scripture. You've heard me say along the way that the phrase appears over 350 times in the Bible. (*Thank you, Richard Rohr*) Every time the door opens on God and God's larger world... someone starts shakin' and they should... if they've really seen... they will.

And then someone has to say... "**Fear not!**" (Sometimes they say "Lo!" first... "LO! Fear Not!") Angels love saying Lo! "**Lo!**" "**Hey, if you see Gabriel, tell him I said 'lo'.**" It's actually where we get our word for "hel... lo."

Peter sees... and Peter is afraid. He is humbled before Jesus... having seen, finally, who Jesus is. And I love the way this happened. Peter apparently wasn't all that impressed with the miracles happening in his den.

Mother-in-law's fever gone...

Demons gone...

Various diseases gone...

I'm thinking, that would do the trick for me... But for Peter, there's no "**Jesus, you are the Lord**" confession. Not until Jesus gets into his boat... Not until Jesus got in Peter's space... climbed into his world.

Jesus borrowed Peter's boat so he could give his morning sermon where he could be heard. Peter and his friends were listening in while they continued to clean their nets from having been out all night.

About the time they finished cleaning, Jesus finished preaching... and then he suggested to Peter that they make another run at it, this time *in deeper water*.

Do not miss that. The nets were empty and Jesus sends them out into deeper water. These little gems in scripture are not there accidentally.

So... Luke's not simply trying to tell us how Jesus finally wowed Peter so he could get him to join up as a disciple. (Healing his mother-in-law didn't do the trick but a big catch might.) There's more going on.

Luke, the Church, the Spirit... are all speaking to us about what it means to know God. That's what the Bible is finally about.

And Peter, with all his trying and working through the night, has come up empty... and we do too... fishing for so very much for so long... through the night.

And Jesus comes to move us to deeper waters.

And in the story, Peter, who's the expert, is tempted I'm sure to tell Jesus to stick to teaching and let him take care of the fishing... but he goes out anyway... probably just to be nice to the visiting Rabbi.

His buddies and coworkers, who have been up all night, are grumbling and griping as they row out and Peter's saying, **"Just humor him, fellas... what's it gonna hurt?"**

Well, they got out in the deep waters where they never fished that time of year...

And dropped their nets...

Which filled up immediately.

And as two boats sank with the weight of the catch, Peter sank to his knees in fear. **"Get away from me. You don't belong here around a sinner like me."**

And Jesus said, "Lo..."

Well... **"Fear not!" "Don't be afraid."**

"I'm going to make you a fisher of men." **"Follow me,"** into something new.

See, that's the other part of the spiritual rule of thumb. It's not just that you see the reality of your brokenness... But that you see beyond it... we may be broken but we aren't our brokenness. Peter isn't just a sinner. There's something deeper and truer about him.

There is something deeper than your brokenness and that is your blessedness.

In our sin and in this sinful realm we become less than we are. But when we awaken... or when we're awakened... we begin to see something different. The epiphany isn't just about God, it's about us and who we can become.

"Don't be afraid... there's something I want you to do and be."

God doesn't open the door so we'll have a room with a view, a life with a view... just to give us a peek at something else. God always is inviting through the door into a larger world.

Peter is standing in between two worlds. One he knows very well. He's comfortable in it... secure... it's normal. He can do life there with his eyes closed.

Go out every afternoon... cast the nets where they're biting.

Haul in the catch... clean the fish... clean the nets.

Go home... eat... sleep...

Get up and repeat the process the next day.

He takes a break on the Sabbath and says his prayers. Occasionally, he takes off for a holy week but that's about it. This is what he knows, day after day, week after week, year after year... the boats, the nets, a lake, and a God he visits on Saturdays down at the synagogue.

Now, he's standing in the threshold looking at one world that he knows and one that he has absolutely no knowledge of... a world where the rules he learned of fish and fishing and nets and mothers-in-law, don't seem to apply.

"Fishers of men?" "What in the world is he talking about?"

It seems crazy, it's so unknown but he's seen something of it in Jesus and so off he goes, never really to pick up his nets again. Epiphanies are hard to ignore and walk away from.

Epiphanies are open doors for all of us... those moments in life where God, in some way, invites us to come and stand in the threshold and look out at something larger.

Richard Rohr calls this Liminal space... liminality. The word “Limen” in Latin means threshold. It’s that space where you are in-between. It’s the place of transformation between one thing and another. Between who you were and who you might be.

That place between one way of life and another,
Between this worldview and one that is larger and truer.

This is the threshold... and when God opens the door that’s where we find ourselves. And it’s not an easy place to be because biblically speaking... you just never know where the story is going to go... how it’s going to end.

That may be the most common theme of scripture... **“Following God into a new world is like a box of chocolates... you never know what you’re going to get.”** (Just another little spiritual rule of thumb.)

But don’t be afraid. Fear not! Lo, y’all!
Go on through the door...

It’s time to get out into the deeper water.

Once you’ve seen God... you can never really look at yourself the same way again... Seeing God changes how you see yourself and the world. Got it?

Peter got a new name and started fishing in a new way in a bigger world... right behind Jesus. And after a while there’s a déjà vu moment on the beach.

Remember after the resurrection... Jesus tells them how to fish again, **“Hey, you guys, Lo.... Out there.... try casting on the other side of the boat, I’m sure you’ll catch a big one.”** And they did... and Peter got so excited he swam to the shore.

And so, there the two of them are again at the end of the story... on the beach again. And there, with the sound off morning waves lapping up on the shore, they talk about Peter’s love for Christ and how he’ll need to feed the sheep now.

And Peter wants some detail about what that might mean... but you know he isn’t going to get it because that’s against that spiritual rule of thumb for an authentic journey... **“You never really know what you’re going to get.”**

But, he does give him a peek.

Peter, **“When you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to do.”**

“In the end, Peter, you won’t be in control at all... you’ll just be led around to places you can’t even imagine.”

And Peter smiles and thinks to himself... **“Yeah... but what else is new? Fear not,”** he echoes to himself.

Peter kept fishing in deeper waters... and he kept trying to become what he was... a real rock of a person. Tradition has it, he wound up in Rome.

I understand that in a fairly recent excavation under the Vatican, just directly under the main altar in the Basilica, they’ve found the body of a first century man and over the body is carved in stone... **“Petras.”**

That’s a long way from Galilee.

It all started when he saw God.

When he saw himself.

When he saw the world.

Got it?