

Show and Tell

John 1:1-5, 10-14, Colossians 3:12-17
Homily by Richard A. Kauffman
Christmas Sunday, December 26, 2021

John 1:1-5, 10-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Colossians 3:12-17

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Until about the age of six, my family went to the East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in the city of Lancaster, PA. We children were all given a penny bank that was modeled after the church building as it looked in the 1950s. It was made by one of the pastors who was a pattern maker at the Hubley Toy Company in Lancaster. We children were encouraged to put pennies in this bank and then bring the money to church on missionary Sunday. Our pennies would go to missionaries who were sent out from the congregation, as I recall.

This church bank is one of my treasures. I've heard one like it was sold at an auction in Lancaster for over \$700. I don't want to part with mine. I cherish it and the memories associated with it.



So what teaching technique have I just used? Show-and-tell: I showed you my church penny bank and told you about it.

A few years ago I read this phrase on Facebook: “**Whereas Jesus is God’s ultimate show-and-tell...**” (Peggy Blanchard Hunt). What a great shorthand way of talking about the incarnation, of Jesus Emmanuel, God with us.

Whereas Jesus is God’s ultimate show and tell, that means that:

- If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus—his life, his ministry and teachings; look even to his death and resurrection—the whole Jesus.
- If you want to know what God is up to in the world, look to Jesus—he who forgave sins and hung out with the marginalized.
- If you want to know what we are to become, look to Jesus, the authentic human being, the one who shows us how God wants us to live. Think about this: Jesus shows us what it means to be human, truly human. I just read something a pastor wrote this week, who said that Jesus showing us what it means to be human is Jesus’ greatest gift to us. I wouldn’t go that far, but it is an important gift.
- If you want to know how we’re to live, look to Jesus—he who taught us to love our neighbors, pray for our enemies, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned.

We are God’s show-and-tell people, in spite of our flaws and brokenness.

- As God’s show-and-tell people, we are a people of hope, which is especially needed in dark times. Hope is not optimism in spite of evidence. Hope trusts that good overcomes evil, love overcomes hate, resurrection overcomes death; Christian hope is rooted in the faith that, though God isn’t a controlling God, in an ultimate sense God is in control.
- As God’s show-and-tell people, we are a people of hospitality: we belong to a body—the church—that has no ethnic, racial, national, or economic differences. Identity politics pits groups against other groups. We Christians have our own identity politics: Because we belong to Jesus and a body without borders—the church—we can reach out across ethnic, racial, national and even religious boundaries to welcome other people.

Yes, we are God’s show **AND** tell people—both showing and telling are needed:

- **Showing without telling can be ambiguous, leaving others to wonder what our actions were about, what the motivation was for the actions.** Unfortunately, we Mennonites are better at showing than telling. We frequently quote the saying attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.” It shows our bias for actions over words. Well, what if words are necessary, not just an appendage to our works of peace and righteousness but as an integral aspect of our works? (Sara Wenger Shenk, who was president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary until a few years ago, just published an important book, appropriately titled *Tongue-tied: Learning the Lost Art of Talking About Faith*. I highly recommend it to you.) Mennonite Central Committee sets a good example. They stamp their logo on all the aid they give out, with the words: *In the name of Christ*. The motive for the action is made clear.
- **Telling without showing is hollow**—mere words, empty words. Faith without works is dead, James said.

As God's show-and-tell people, we are part of God's ongoing embodiment in the world. Note the bookmark placed in our mailboxes by the Mission commission with the quote from Teresa of Avila: "*Christ has no body now on earth but ours.*"

Whereas, Jesus is God's ultimate show-and-tell.... **Thanks be to God!** I cannot think of a better shorthand way of talking about the incarnation.

And we too are God's **show-and-tell** people in the world. *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
Amen.