

Sermon  
Epiphany 3B  
Mark 1:14-20

Epiphany. What is the meaning of that word? We know it as January 6, the day we celebrate the arrival of the wise men who honored Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But what is the meaning of that word *epiphany*?

In a non-religious context, epiphany means a sudden realization or comprehension. In *Back to the Future*, Doc Brown had an epiphany when he fell off the toilet, banging his head and knocking himself out. When he came to, he had a sudden realization, a comprehension, an epiphany, that led him to design the flux capacitor and change the world as he knew it.

In our religious context, Epiphany is the manifestation of God in Christ to the Gentiles (represented by those wise men). It is that time and season where the light of Christ shines in the world casting aside the darkness. It is that time when we, like Doc Brown, have a comprehension, an epiphany, that a new thing is about to happen which has the ability to change the world as we know it.

During this season of Epiphany, we are presented with a series of texts that manifest Jesus the Christ to us. They show forth his ministry through his calling of disciples, his teachings and preaching, and his exorcisms and healings. As we move through this season, I invite you to hear these stories in an Epiphany context; or, in other words, a context that lets you comprehend Jesus in a new way.

Today we hear the call of Simon and Andrew and James and John. They are all fishermen, but they may not all be the same class of fishermen. Simon and Andrew are casting their nets from the shore, for they have no boat. When called, they immediately leave their nets to follow Jesus.

James and John were probably better-off. They had a family fishing business that they worked with their father. The business did well enough that they could afford to have a hired crew. And yet, when Jesus calls them, they too leave everything behind and follow.

How do you feel about this story? How do you feel about the idea of these men easily and immediately leaving behind their jobs and family to follow an itinerant preacher man? If you find it hard to believe, maybe you need an epiphany.

Here's my epiphany story. In the spring of 1996 I had been working with a company for about seven years. The pay was good, not great, but good. We had a small, tight-knit group in a satellite office. And we were growing. About this time, my parish also called a new rector.

One day he and I went to lunch to talk about church business. Once we got the business out of the way, he said, "One more thing. I've been talking to people and I think it's a good idea if you go to seminary. Oh . . . look at the time; I have to go." And with that, he was out the door.

Within two weeks of that conversation the job I enjoyed fell apart. The boss became erratic. People began arguing and participating in "parking lot insurrections." And to top it all off, when I arranged to meet with friends about some generalized issues I was having, every single one of them asked me if I were going to go to seminary.

It didn't take long for me to figure out that this is where I was being called. Once I did, once I answered, "Yes," then I was ready to go NOW. Had I been able to arrange it, I would've enrolled at SWTS in the fall of 1996. In short, I was ready to go immediately.

What about you? What was it like when you fell in love? Did you want to immediately run away with that person? Have you ever felt called to something so strongly that you immediately made arrangements to make it happen?

In that moment, you have fallen off the toilet. In that moment, you have come to such clarity, such comprehension, such an Epiphany, that you design your own flux capacitor. You are able to see things differently in a way that changes how you are forever.

Simon and Andrew had their Epiphany when Jesus called them from their nets. This call was so strong that they left behind their main (maybe only) source of income to follow Jesus. James and John had their Epiphany when Jesus called them from their business and their family. This call was so strong that, in a society where family ties were ironclad, they chose to walk away from their biological family and enter into a new kind of family.

Granted, we don't know the back story to this story. According to the Gospel of John, Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. So it's possible that this experience prepared the others in a way that made following Jesus easier. But that's not the point. The point is that these four men saw clearly that Jesus was doing a new thing and they were called to be a part of it.

These four men left behind a steady and predictable life. They left behind steady jobs and a steady family. They left these behind in favor of an uncertain life. They entered a life that was constantly in flux. By doing so, they followed the one who had the capacity to change them. Jesus changed them to fish for people. He changed them to see abundance rather than scarcity. He changed them to see people as people, not as others. He gave them an epiphany of what the kingdom of God could look like. In short, Jesus is the original flux capacitor.

As we move through the Epiphany season, may you hear these readings in a new way. May you follow your call immediately and without reservation. May you be willing to leave behind the certainty of what was and live into Christ's death and resurrection. And may the Epiphany of Christ change you in such a way that, like Doc Brown and the disciples, nothing is ever the same again.

Amen.

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