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Abstract

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Matthew 2:9–12

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Christmas 2ABC – Online Liturgy

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Sunday, January 3, 2021 | EPIPHANY | EPIPHANY OF THE LORD | YEARS ABC

<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 60:1–6
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14
<i>New Testament</i>	Ephesians 3:1–12
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 2:1–12 ⁱ

The account of the wise men involves searching – initially by looking in the wrong place – for the newborn king. They eventually find him by following the star to Bethlehem. God’s guidance in a dream warns them to take a different route home.

Looking for the direction God has for us is not always as easy as following a star or hearing from God in a dream. When/how have you experienced God guiding you or helping you to make decisions? Particularly at the start of a new year and a new term, we may all be called to reflect on where best we can look for and recognise signs from God that offer us guidance.

This week we explore: where to look for the direction God has for our lives.

Pre-Service
Introit What a beautiful name
Greeting May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ The Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all and also with you
We Gather A new year has begun. Let us leave behind all that is past, and walk together into the future. Let us trust in the God of new beginnings, and worship the God of fresh hopes. We acknowledge the First people, the first inhabitants and custodians of this place from time beyond remembering. <i>Let us pray</i> Lord of our journeys, help us this day to have eyes to see your leading, ears to hear your guidance, and a heart of courage,

	<p>that we may journey faithfully and find your way – even when the path may seem difficult and dark. Amen.</p>
	<p>Hymn/song O come all ye faithful</p>
	<p>Welcome As we enter a new year, there is hope that the major catastrophes of 2020 will not be repeated. In the past 12 months, we've been in the throes of unprecedented bushfires, flooding and of course, the Coronavirus pandemic. These occurrences defined 2020.</p> <p>While some might hope for a new beginning, the reality is, the future is not clear, making it difficult to look and plan forward.</p> <p>In the path of healing from collective trauma, we need to work through the grief of all we have lost because of the pandemic and will continue to do so for some time.</p> <p>Our hope comes through that turning point of time when God entered the world as the Christ Child. Christ came to share life with us and to open the way for love to hold us and see us through what comes in life, things that we cannot stop or change.</p> <p>It is important for us to acknowledge that things are not alright, have not been alright for some time, and will not be alright for a while yet to come.</p> <p>In acknowledging and naming the suffering of the world, we help people to identify with their own feelings of suffering and lament.</p> <p><i>Let us pray</i> We come gracious God, into a new year, from our celebrations of Christmas and the wonder of the word made flesh and dwelling among us as one of us.</p> <p>As we enter the journey of a new year, full of uncertainty and possibility, we are aware that no matter what this year delivers, you are with us; we can know your presence; we can rely on the Spirit as we seek to be your people, living out our faith in Jesus, to bring the reign of God's kingdom alive. Amen</p>

	<p>Readings Matthew 2:1–12</p> <p><i>respond</i> For the word of the Lord</p> <p>Thanks be to God</p>
	<p>Hymn/song/video I heard the voice of Jesus say</p>
	<p>We say Sorry Lord, just as the wise men set out into new territory in search of you, help us to step out of life’s narrow tramlines. Forgive us for seeking you out only in areas we know and in which we are comfortable. In their day, the wise men were outsiders, yet were guided by a star and spoken to in a dream; their steps directed for your purpose. Forgive us when we fail to see – or even dismiss – your leading from unexpected places and unlikely people.</p> <p>Lord, forgive us. Widen our vision and expand our minds to search and discern you in all places and people, that we may be drawn closer to you. Amen.</p>
	<p>Hymn/Song</p>

Response: Kneeling And Redirection

Matthew 2:1-12

Three wise people come from the east bringing gifts to the infant Jesus,
 and in the process receive a gift worth the distance and effort they spent.
After depositing their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh,
 they in turn receive a gift: They are redirected.

That is what we all get after kneeling before Jesus: we are redirected.
That different direction after kneeling before Jesus
 means that our joy in life will not be in seeking happiness and fulfillment directly,
 but in intentionally walking the way of service, sacrifice, and surrender.
The new direction involves finding the holy in the least expected places,
 the very places we would most like to avoid.

I. Different Way of Pain

Jesus redirects us by inviting us to face pain head-on rather than avoiding it,
 which is the way most people confront being uncomfortable and being in pain.
Remember that moment in which Peter makes the great confession that Jesus is the Christ of God.
 right after that Jesus says he will be opposed by the religious leaders and will be killed.
That is when Peter takes Jesus aside and "rebukes him" (a strong Biblical word).
 In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter and says in essence,
 "Your refusal to face pain is the kind of work that is at its core evil."

Jesus then sets his face toward Jerusalem and faces the inevitable pain of life.

Jesus instructs us that our joy in life will not be in the escaping of pain and evil,
but will be in the very midst of the storm of pain and evil.

You might remember also that Peter was the one who protested that storm on the sea.

When we read the words of Jesus, "Peace, be still," we make a grave error.

We assume that he was talking to the weather, but he was not.

He spoke to Peter.

God does not come and take us away from the inevitable storms of life.

God comes in the form of the promised presence of calm amid whatever happens to us.

God has never promised to take us away from any of life's disasters or pain.

God has always promised to go with us through all of them.

That promised presence makes the difference.

When we make friends with the fact that to live is to know pain
and that it is better faced than escaped (which is never successful),
then we can see more clearly.

We can see that the common thread in the human family
is the experience of pain.

We are not united by joys.

Joys are so varied, and people are joyous for quite different reasons.

We are not united by colour or language or belief.

We are united by those things that grieve us.

It is said, "All our grief comes from one thing:

something ends before we were ready for it to end."ⁱⁱ

There is never a more common thread among people in life

than in the conversations that we have with people who lost.

The language of our pain and losses is the same.

A rabbi student came to love one of his teachers and told the rabbi,

"I love you, Rabbi!"

The reply was swift. "How can you love me unless you know what hurts me?"

We find in time that to know truly and be bound to one another

is to be open to and share what hurts the other.

Jesus invites us toward Jerusalem to face pain rather than run from it.

It is the only way we can get home,

and the way we would most like to avoid.

II. Different Way of Small Victories

On this day of Epiphany,

which celebrates the light of Christ being spread into the world,

it is a good time for us to make friends with the small victories that will be ours,

rather than continue the myth that there are big deals that we must negotiate.

On this day, it is good for us to take a Mother Teresa 101 course.

Three things she said will help us.

The first has to do with the time she came to her Bishop

and asked that he create an order for her to lead
that would take care of dying people on the streets.
He asked her how much money she had.
She pulled out two cents.
He said that she could not build an order on two cents.
She said, "With God and two cents you can do anything."
She won a small victory of permission
to paint her vision of much love for a dying world.

The second thing has to do with what Mother Teresa said
just after she won the Nobel Peace Prize.
She announced to the world:
"There are no big deals anymore.
Only many small things to be done with great love."

The third thing that Mother Teresa said
that helps us to serve Christ was this:
"Don't think that by your little acts of kindness
that you are going to change the world.
AND it is so important that you do them."

Do you know the story of the star-thrower.
The star-thrower knows the power of small victories.
The star-thrower is the man on the beach
who is faced by millions of starfish washed ashore
that will die in the day if they are not thrown back in.

A man at breakfast watches from a distance
as another man carefully throws some back, one at a time.
He asks him what he is doing. The reply dwells on the obvious.
"I am throwing the starfish back in so they can live."
The observer musters up some cynicism and says,
"You don't think this will make a difference, do you?"
The star-thrower holds up one starfish and says,
"It makes a difference to this one." And he throws it in the ocean.

When Jesus asked us to let our light shine before all people,
I am sure he did not have a lighthouse in mind,
but simple everyday acts of kindness to be done in his name,
most of which are given anonymously.

Listen to the stories of two women who knew the meaning of small victories.
Both lived in poor communities and wanted to contribute
but didn't know what to do.
The first lady had a vision of helping the kids in the neighbourhood.
She said the vision that came to her
was God instructing her to back her car out of the garage.
She did.
Next, she decided that the open room in the garage
could be made into a place to teach and nurture the neighbourhood children.
She invited them in, taught them about God and self-esteem,

and nurtured their reading and writing abilities.
 Many years later those young people come back from leading successful lives
 and proclaim that the difference was in this wonderful woman
 who backed her car out of the garage and gave her love to kids who needed it.

The other woman not far away wanted to feed the homeless in the neighbourhood
 and couldn't get a permit from the city.

Watching the people needing food daily,
 she decided to go the way of the Nike slogan and "Just Do It."
 The city said she could not feed people out of the front of the house,
 so she set up benches in the backyard and fed 150 people a day.

When the city called, she said that it was not breaking the law:
 "These people are not homeless people or clients; they are my family.
 I always feed my family in the backyard of my home."
 And the city left her alone.

She knew the different way that Jesus calls,
 the way of small victories done quietly in his name.

Someone said,
 "Life is what happens to you when you make other plans."
 Jesus says that life begins by taking a different way home than the world teaches.
 Jesus shows us that by kneeling in front of the divine, we get a new direction.
 That new direction includes facing the inevitable pain in life
 and developing a theology of small victories
 as we give ourselves to what God needs done next.

The way of Jesus is a longer way than we anticipated traveling
 and is most often on a road that we would not have chosen
 had we known where it was going.
 And the end of the journey is to discover that
 the redirected way of life that Jesus calls us to is, in fact, a blessing.

To walk the way of Jesus is to kneel before the holy with empty hands,
 not with the words "give me,"
 but with the humble prayer that begins, "make me."

At that moment Christ sets us on paths we would never have chosen.
 In the end of life,
 we discover that his redirected paths
 are the ones we would have chosen in the first place,
 had we known.

Had we known that the human family
 is blessed by facing pain rather than running from it,
 and had we known that the deepest joy of all
 is in the small shafts of light we can shed on a suffering world,
 we would have gladly chosen the way of the Christ in the first place.
 Amen

	Hymn/song
	There's a light upon the mountain

	<p>Offering OFFERTORY SENTENCE We honour God through the gifts we offer. Let us bring gifts of hearts, minds, body and soul this day. OFFERTORY PRAYER Holy God, source of light for all the world. This day we bring you gifts of time, talents, relationships, and resources. Receive them that we may be participants in shining your light. Use them that they may bring justice and love on earth. Bless them that they may share abundant life with all. Amen.</p>
	<p>Notices</p>
	<p>Prayers for all people</p>
	<p>Lord's Prayer</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.</p> <p>Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. AMENⁱⁱⁱ</p>
	<p>Hymn/song TIS #209 – “And can it be”</p>
	<p>We are sent out</p> <p>Lord, as we continue our journey with you this week, as we seek to live out our faith every day, be with us, surprise with your love, nudge us when you want us to see or do something new – for Jesus' sake.</p> <p>We go into this new year with joy and wonder, shining the light and life of Christ in the world. May God give you courage, wisdom and hope, that you may live with boldness, serve with kindness, and find joy in unexpected places. Amen.</p> <p>May the Lord bless us</p>

	and keep us May His face shine upon us and be gracious to us May he lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace
	Benediction Aud Lang Sign
	Thank you

ⁱ [*Revised Common Lectionary*](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

ⁱⁱ Carlisle Marney

ⁱⁱⁱ English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988