

Another Road



Welcome to this celebration of the twelfth day of Christmas. I hope you are enjoying your partridge in a pear tree, two turtle doves, three French hens, four calling birds, and particularly your five golden rings. This, of course, is Epiphany, a festival of light- a moment of recognition of the presence of God. Traditionally, this is the day when we celebrate the arrival of the three magi offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh before the newborn king.

You may have heard about the three six-year-old boys who were playing the wise men in their church Christmas program. As they came up to Mary and Joseph at the stable, the first one handed over his present and said, "Gold." The second presented his gift and said, "Myrrh." The third one then gave them his treasure and said, "And Frank sent this."

Today, the Day of Epiphany, we remember the story of the Magi and Herod. Epiphany is the day of light, when all will be revealed, or made known. As unlikely as it may seem, Herod offered a job description for followers of Jesus. He ordered the Magi to "Seek, Find, Tell."

Seek. Seek in the place where you are - not some other mystical place where the sun is supposed to shine all day. Not in a place of perpetual happiness or place where not a sound is heard. You will not find Jesus Christ in all those places. You will find Jesus in the midst of life. Jesus is in the face of a child, whether that child's face is beaming with happiness or distorted by pain. You will see Christ in your neighbour. You see the Magi may have traveled far but in reality, if we cannot see God in all the little and unimportant places and people, then perhaps we cannot see God at all.

A story,

Some years ago, a little girl named Liz was suffering from a rare & serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her 5-year old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated for only a moment before taking a deep

breath and saying, "Yes I'll do it if it will save her." As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled seeing the color returning to her cheek. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, "Will I start to die right away". Being young, the little boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give his sister all of his blood in order to save her.

This story illustrates how close by and ordinary is the grace that Epiphany reveals. You will not have to look far if you are truly seeking the face of God. It's all around us, if we have the eyes of faith to see it.

Have you heard the Sufi story about the man who had his lamp going in the full light of day while he swept the ground outside his little home? His neighbor came along, and seeing him sweeping the ground, asked, "What are you looking for?" "I am looking for some coins I dropped," he replied. "Where did you drop them?" asked the neighbor. "In the house," came the reply. "So why are you looking for them out here?" "Because the light is better out here!"

Today, on the Day of Epiphany we are reminded to look deeply, and not to be afraid. God can be found in some very surprising places and in the hearts of some pretty amazing people, who are small by the standards of our culture and society. This is the God we celebrate today, the One who is made known in a helpless child. That is Good News for us, and for all who seek the fullness of faith. Seek. It's the first step if we choose to take *another road*. Find. This is the second step. Finding the priceless gem of faith in the midst of life is a tricky business. The Magi, when they found Jesus, learned more than they expected to learn. They came looking for a kingly presence. Who they found, so the story tells us, was someone entirely unexpected. They were likely "blown away" by the claim that this child was a royal figure in God's plan.

What can we claim to find then? Today we come to the table – in faith – inviting God to come close and touch us in a way that we feel blessed and loved and worthy of being a part of the community of believers. The table is set- we are as ready as we can be. Now it's up to each one of you to think about what you believe and where God can find you in the sharing of the elements as you come forward. I see, study and believe the life-affirming, life-changing gospel of Jesus. I try to structure my life in ways that contribute to those gospel values. I live my life *as if* these values and claims were worth my life, and the life of my community of faith. I wager all that I have and all that I am, in my own feeble way, to stretch my imagination, my heart and my mind to see God and the Spirit of Christ in the ways I spoke of above. I do these things not to assure my salvation. Rather, I do these things in order to seek, find and tell about Jesus and the hope that I find in his life, his ministry and his teachings.

Tell. The evangelists have it right when they say that they cannot be silent after they have received the grace of Christ in their hearts. All who seek and find the grace of God in whatever way we find it have a deep urge to give voice to our experience. Those who tell their stories of grace and love, of finding Christ – and being found by Christ – in the most amazing ways bring

the message of God to life in fleshly, authentic ways. Until the telling moves beyond words and into loving actions imitating Christ, the telling is done with only a half-voice. Authentic living in the midst of God's world and with all the varieties of people in it is the way we spend our life energies when we follow Jesus. This is the story I tell with my words and I hope with my life. It's not complicated. It's rather like this story.

One night, at 11:30 P.M., an older African American woman was standing on the side of an Alabama highway trying to endure a lashing rainstorm. Her car had broken down and she desperately needed a ride. Soaking wet, she decided to flag down the next car. A young white man stopped to help her, generally unheard of in those conflict-filled 1960s. The man took her to safety, helped her get assistance and put her into a taxi cab. She seemed to be in a big hurry, but wrote down his address and thanked him. Seven days went by and a knock came on the man's door. To his surprise, a giant console color TV was delivered to his home. A special note was attached.

It read:

"Thank you so much for assisting me on the highway the other night. The rain drenched not only my clothes, but also my spirits. Then you came along. Because of you, I was able to make it to my dying husband's bedside just before he passed away... God bless you for helping me and unselfishly serving others."

Sincerely, Mrs. Nat King Cole.

The unknown man was living his faith when he reached out to help another human being in need. Friends, it is that simple. Seek. Find. Tell. The joy found in choosing to walk *another road!* It's our job description, first offered by Herod to the Magi. Let those who have ears, hear and respond. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Ellen Redcliffe
Matthew 2:1-12
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