

January 3, 2010

Scripture: Matthew 2: 1-12

Sermon: "Following Yonder Star"

Mike and I have been having a serious discussion lately. It is a topic that finds its way into our daily conversations. And to be honest, neither one of us likes to bring it up, but it is something that we must deal with and deal with soon:

Who is going to put up the Christmas decorations?

Each day, I remind Mike that we have an agreement: I decorate. He puts them away. And each and every time, I bring this topic up; he simply reminds me that technically Christmas doesn't end until Tuesday night about midnight. Technically, he is doing the right thing by waiting to put away our Christmas decoration. Technically, we are still celebrating Christmas. Technically, the manger scene stays out until Epiphany which is Wednesday.

Needless to say, we see things differently. Because you see, I am the type of person who needs order. I am the type who makes lists and then checks things off when things are done. I need to get our life back on an even tilt. I need the reindeer taken off the front lawn. I need to put Christmas away so that I can move into the new year. I need Christmas put away.

I guess my feelings were put best by someone else this week. "I am glad that Christmas is over and life can now get back to normal." I need normal. I need order. I need the Christmas decorations put away now.

And even as I say this, here we are today, reading about the three magi coming to Jesus. We are still celebrating the birth narratives of Jesus. We are still welcoming and worshipping the Christ child. This child that we waited for so long, who we prepared for, who we prayed for is still here. And I am ready to put him away so I can get back to have a normal life once more. And I have to admit that I do find myself feeling guilty for wanting to put baby Jesus back in the box, to put him away in my holiday closet. I find myself feeling guilty for wanting my life to get back to some sort of normalcy, almost as if I am saying that my life is not normal as long as there are visible reminders on display that Christ is in it. Sort of ironic in my profession?

For weeks, we have been waiting. For weeks, we read about the promises of the Messiah who will come and change the world. And just a few weeks ago, we celebrated his birth. We lifted up our voices in song. We exclaimed joyously that Jesus Christ is born! And now, we want things to get back to normal. It is almost as if we are treating Jesus as a dinner guest that has overstayed his welcome. Thanks Jesus for coming, but now it is time to move on! We are changing over the season, and we will see you again during Lent.

And I found myself asking: Is this what the Magi felt like on that fateful day so long ago? Did they feel that it was time to move on once they saw the Christ child?

They had traveled far away from home, not knowing exactly what would await them when they got to the destination. All they had to go on was the star which they had seen at its rising. And

they arrive at Jerusalem, thinking here it is! The place where the King of the Jews has been born. So they begin to ask questions about where to find this child and they discover to their dismay that they have to journey just a little bit farther. 9 more miles to be exact, down a treacherous road, down a road that had not been maintained by Jerusalem's transportation department. There will be potholes. There will be bumps. There will be pitfalls.

But they decided that the King that they seek is worth the journey, so off they go, 9 more miles. And finally they arrive and they offer him gifts fit for a king. They worship him and pay him homage. They follow yonder star and their searching is honored and rewarded. They kneel down and offer him gifts that are worthy of a King.

And now it is time to go. They don't want to overstay their welcome. They have just met the Christ child. Their lives have been touched by God's grace. They have had the opportunity to worship the promised Messiah. And now it is time to move on.

And I wonder: now that they have met, worshipped the Christ child, do they hope that their lives will get back to some sort of normalcy? Are they thankful that they made the journey but now are ready to put this moment behind them and get back to their lives? Do you think one of them said, "I am glad we did this, but it will be nice to be back at home with our charts, with our books, and the stars?"

Do you think that they were ready to close the books on the prophecies and promises of the Child now that they had seen him? Do you think they were ready for life to get back to normal? Is it time to move on?

The author of Matthew gives us the answers to these questions with just one phrase: "They went home another way." With this simple phrase, Matthew is letting us know that the magi's lives have been changed by their encounter with the Christ child. Yes, it is time to return home, but not without some noticeable differences. They know that their lives will never be normal again. Certainly, they may fall into the routine of their lives once again, but they would never be the same. They have worshipped the real King of the Jews. They have paid homage to the promised Messiah. They have opened themselves up to the possibilities of God in their lives.

Yes, it is time to move on but as now as changed people of faith, never going back to the normal lives that they once knew. Now their lives would be different. Now they were different. And now, the way things used to be doesn't look so good.

They had worshipped the new born King who has come for all people, who has come to show God's people how to live in true relationship with one another and with God, who had come to bring grace to all of God's people. They had followed the star and experienced God's work in this world. They had started a journey because of "God's prompting, who initiated their asking, their seeking, and their finding."

In those few 9 miles that separated Bethlehem and Jerusalem, "the magi's journey...exposes God's intention to welcome everyone into the joy of [God's] home not made with hands but eternal in the heavens' and remarkably on earth as well."

Lives don't go back to the way they used to be once you have encountered something so amazing as the Christ child. "Once [we] have met the Christ, [we] will always go home by a different road."

And that is the magi's message to us this morning: You can put away the Christmas decorations. You can even put away your manger scenes. It is okay because your lives have been changed by your encounters with the Christ child and that is something that will touch your lives forever.

The magi serve to remind us that our encounter with the Christ child does not end simply because we do not see him everyday. We hold the promises and hopes deep in our hearts and continue to seek out Jesus in our lives because we have been changed by his grace. We continue to live out our faith each and every day of our lives because we have worshipped the newborn King. We realize that once we have experienced the Christ child, that we are called to reorient our lives, now as changed people of faith.

And it may not be an easy task. And our journeys of change will be filled with many unexpected things. There will be times when we think that we have arrived at our destination, just to find out that there are 9 more miles. And that these miles will not be easy. They will be dangerous roads. There will be pitfalls and potholes. There will be moments when we will want to turn around and go back to our comfort zones.

And each time, we think this we are called to remember the magi and their journey home. They went home a different way, remembering their encounter with the Christ child, having their lives changed by God's grace through Jesus Christ.

The magi serve to remind us that Lives to not go back to normal once they have been touched by the love and hope of God. Lives to not go back to normal once they have changed by the fulfilled promises of peace and grace of God. Lives do not go back to normal once you have opened yourselves up to the possibilities of God.

When we accepted God into our lives, we decided that the love of God was worth journey and so we continue in faith. Our lives may fall into our routine once again, but we will never go back to being normal any more. Normal means that we accept that there are children in our world who go to bed every hungry and scared every night. Normal means for our world that we accept that it is okay for the poor to be forgotten. Normal means that it is okay for our older generation to sometimes have to choose between medicine to keep them healthy or food to survive. Normal means that it is okay for our world to continue to be divided based on skin color. Normal means that the powerful will rule and the weak will be lost. Normal means that we can ignore the signs that our earth is being destroyed by pollution.

Once lives are changed by Jesus Christ, we can never go back to being normal.

We are called as people of faith to remember that once we experience Jesus in our lives that we are called to speak out against what our world embraces as normal.

We are called as people of faith to remember that God's grace changes lives and we are called to take that life-changing grace out into our community. We are called as people of faith to break down the "normal" barriers that divide our world and to invite all of God's children to the table.

Lives do not go back to being normal once you have experienced the Christ child. Lives do not go back to being normal once you have encountered God's graces. Lives do not go back to normal once you have opened yourself up to the possibilities of God.

Once lives have been changed by an encountered the living God, the normal way of things are unacceptable. The journey is worth the effort. The destination is worth the travel. The experience is like no other. The experience of God's grace and love in our lives.

Things will never be normal again. Amen.