January 12th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Epiphany

10:30am

Home By Another Road

I. Courage in Three-Fold

As we recall and remember our well-known story of three wisemen carrying gifts to the newborn King, there are three marks of courage and bravery for these folks. The first initial move of bravery was the capacity to listen to the call, to follow a star, to follow the right star, the one that shone brightly. To trust a star is brave all by itself. Though in our liturgical calendar, Epiphany quickly follows Christ’s birth, scholars share that it would take at least forty days, if not more, to get to that manger scene. Imagine holding onto that hope and trust of a star for forty days.

We also assume that it was three wisemen – that’s what we see in nativity scenes, probably coming to that conclusion because three gifts were brought: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But there could have been more wisepeople, we just don’t know. But we can imagine that their journey was challenging and probably due to the human condition – there would be arguments, there would be rationing of food, the grumpy travails of foot travel. There’s bravery to set out in the first place, to trust a star, to trust God, in leading them where to go. Before they even get to the manger, we remember their courage in setting out on this mission in faithfulness.

II. The courage of stepping into the manger

Can you then imagine the moment their journey culminated? There must have been a pivotal moment - a moment where they were able to walk up to the Savior of the world, a bouncing baby boy, a moment of realization that all of their journeying was well worth it. If you asked me to walk up to the one destined to be the King, I would feel some level of fear, of trepidation – maybe some kind of star-struck emotion of feeling completely overwhelmed. Yes, the road may have been long and to turn around now would be absurd, but there’s courage in stepping up to Mary and Joseph and this little boy that has been prophesied throughout the ages. What a wonder, what a courageous act, to come forth, to kneel down, and to offer your gifts in humility.

III. Traveling Home

Perhaps the wise men’s greatest act of bravery was when their visit was all over. They had followed the star, they had laid the gifts before the King, but now...now...how are they suppose to get home? They know their very lives are in danger, and moreso, the Savior -- and they know that Herod cannot find them. The bravest thing they can do is go home, by another path, in secret, without the guidance of a star.

And the reality is, when they get home – who are they now? They have been changed, irreversibly, by seeing and knowing and meeting the newborn King. We know, for them, for us, once you know Christ, you can’t go home in the same way. You may return to the familiar streets and avenues, but your perspective has changed. The person you were is no longer the person you are, and how you interpret the world is incredibly different. This is a gift, but a hard one to receive, for change is challenging and you may not be accepted in the same way. To go home and to know it will be different, that is a fierce act of courage.

The good news is that the light that the wisemen found in Jesus Christ is the light that carries us. It is the light that will guide us on a journey that will renew us and make us better disciples to love and serve the world as we are called.

We also, this morning, seek to be people who are better than we were before, to follow the star and to follow the light that we have been given. May the word on the star guide you – whether it is boldness, peace, courage, solidarity, unity – whatever it may be, may it enter into your lives not only today, but next week, next month, this summer, and may you still have it held in a special place when we come together again next Epiphany. May it carry you through the year. As we seek to follow the word on our star, as we are called again and again to grow in this journey of faith.

1. Opening the Word

I would like to close our reflection today through a poem by Rev. Jan Richardson, called “The Blessing of the Magi.” I believe this poem aptly describes the journey that these Magi went on and will inspire us as well as we continue in our faithful journeys. She writes,

There is no reversing this road.  
The path that bore you here goes

in one direction only,  
every step drawing you  
down a way  
by which you will not  
return.

You thought arrival  
was everything,  
that your entire journey  
ended with kneeling  
in the place  
you had spent all  
to find.

When you laid down  
your gift,  
release came with such ease,  
your treasure tumbling  
from your hands  
in awe and  
benediction.

Now the knowledge  
of your leaving  
comes like a stone laid  
over your heart,  
the familiar path closed  
and not even the solace  
of a star  
to guide your way.

You will set out in fear.

You will set out in dream.

but you will set out  
by that other road  
that lies in shadow  
and in dark.

We cannot show you  
the route that will  
take you home;  
that way is yours  
and will be found  
in the walking.  
But we tell you  
you will wonder  
at how the light you thought  
you had left behind  
goes with you,  
spilling from  
your empty hands,  
shimmering beneath  
your homeward feet,  
illuminating the road  
with every step  
you take.

Amen.