

“Close to Home: Home by Another Way”
Matthew 2:1-12

Why do we resist change? There are many answers to this question. On the brain level, resisting change is about convenience and managing our resources. Here is a video clip about this concept: https://youtu.be/zFhR_KY7KrE. From an emotional or spiritual point of view, change also represents disruption and uncertainty. We have a sense of control when we know our reality as it is. Change presents a lot of uncertainty and most of us have a hard time with ambiguity. We also know from experience that not all change is beneficial or good. Yet, one thing is for sure, change is a constant in our lives and most of life is uncertain and cannot be controlled. Wisdom comes when we learn to stay open to new possibilities, while being anchored in love.

The story of the wise men/magi helps us to see this wisdom lived out in powerful ways. This is the part of the Christmas story when wise men from the east decide to take a long journey to seek and behold the Christ child. I often think of the people who go on pilgrimage or spiritual retreats to seek and behold the sacred. There is a lot of letting go of control in such acts. What makes this journey even more interesting is that it was led by a star. People in the Middle East often relied on stars for travel. Because of the heat of the day, people learned to travel at night following the maps of the stars. The study of the stars led the wise men to notice a cosmic event that was taking place. They were people who knew that life here on earth was connected to all the cosmic forces of stars. There was no separation for them between the ordinary and the extraordinary and that kept them open to new revelations. This also kept them open to new guidance even when they were on a sacred pilgrimage. Let's listen to their story from Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he

inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

If we are to be open to the coming of the light of God into our lives, we can do well to follow the example of these wise men by staying open to mystery and by letting go of our need for control and certainty. But staying open does not mean that anything goes. We also need their wisdom of staying anchored in the light of God. Navigating our way through life takes holding on to what truly matters: the love and presence of God. For the wise men, it was represented by the light of the star and their connection to the universe through their study of the stars. They also paid attention to their dreams. When they received a warning in their dream, they paid attention to it and returned home by another way without going back to Herod and telling him where to find Jesus.

What is your star that helps you navigate your way through life with an openness to mystery and to change? What is your guiding star? What

is God giving you as your guiding star for this new year? Are you feeling a nudge to go home by another way?

One of the spiritual practices for epiphany which we have shared over the last few years is star words. This is when we get a star word and let it be a guide for us as to how God is speaking to us. As you walked in, you were given a star word. I invite you to turn to a neighbor or two and share your word with them. Maybe share any questions or insights that come to you about your word and where it may help you to stay focused on love.

We will end with a poem by Sarah Speed called Muscle Memory:

Going home is a form of muscle memory.
Start the car.
Turn on the lights.
Turn left,
turn right.
Pass the big oak tree
and the empty school yard.
Look for the house with the light on.
Look for the house with the open door.
Look for the house that says, "Welcome home."
You'll know when you've arrived—
that's the thing about muscle memory.

But I am learning things of love,
and home is not home unless all are welcomed,
and muscle memory is not justice unless all are safe.
So I'm asking—
can we start the car
and get totally lost
chasing what is right
far off on the horizon?

Can we drive off the road
and get a flat tire

if it means paving the way
for justice and truth?

Can we circle the trees
and miss the school yard completely
if this new way home
includes space for grace?

Can we waste our time
driving in circles
if it gives us time
to add people to the car?

I am learning,
muscle memory and faith
are not one and the same.

So I am asking,
Will you start the car?
Will you turn on the lights?
Will you take a deep breath?

It might be time to get lost.
It might be time to find a new way home. Amen.