

A Moment of Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12

January 5, 2020 – Parkminister UC – Rev. Heather Power

Note: Some inspiration for this sermon came from a reflection on patheos.com.

Over the years I have coordinated a lot of Christmas pageants. Perhaps it's because I've directed so many Christmas pageants, but when I hear the story of the wise ones visiting the baby Jesus, I don't think of three kings at all. No visions of regal visitors decked out in their finest riding atop camels guided by a star for me. Just memories of children decked out in colourful robes that threaten to trip them up, giggling and roughhousing, with their cardboard crowns askew. Of all the children who have played the role of a wise one that I've tried to corral, one of them stands out from all the rest.

Perhaps I remember him so well because he was so little that we couldn't have him kneel at the manger for fear that he would disappear into the hay. Or maybe it was the speed with which he dashed in and out of the gang of angels sending their tinsel halos flying every which way. But I really think it was the ingenious way he and his family solved the problem of his lost gold, that makes, for the purposes of this sermon let's call him Graham, stand out from all the others.

Graham's grandmother, like all the caregiver's of all the wise ones, was responsible for creating a replica of the gift her wise grandchild would bestow on the baby Jesus. And let me tell you, Graham's gift of gold was a cut above the rest. Inside an elaborately carved box that his Dad had picked up on his travels to the Middle East, Graham's grandmother had placed upon a bed of satin a carefully created block of wood wrapped in golden gift paper. It positively sparkled. It must have impressed Graham, because he was forever opening up this box to show his fellow cast-members his treasure. During the dress rehearsal, Graham's performance was perfect. Graham positively perfected the art of gazing up at the makeshift star that hung above the pulpit just past our makeshift manger. When he arrived at the place where the newborn baby Jesus was, Graham proudly approached the child playing Mary and opened the box containing his treasure and proudly announced his gift of gold for the baby Jesus.

Now they, whoever they actually are, say that if the pageant rehearsal doesn't go well then the performance will be wonderful. So, I was more than a little worried when our dress rehearsal went off so splendidly because that could mean only one thing, and I wasn't looking forward to a performance where things went wrong. Sure enough, unbeknownst to me, on the morning of his big performance, somewhere between his home and church, Graham lost his golden treasure. All he had was an empty box when he showed up at his father's pew wailing because all was lost. Graham had no gold to give to the baby Jesus.

So many of us, find ourselves searching for lost treasures. We have been trained to expect that that which we lost will be exactly where we left it, or at the very least somewhere close to where we left it. We return to the place where we think we last held on to the treasure that made our lives better. The only problem is that all too often our treasure has moved and our hopes of finding it right where we left it are nothing more than vain longings, because that

treasure that we lost is no longer where we'd expect to find it. Too many of us gaze up into the sky desperately seeking a star that will shed the light we need to illuminate our problems.

But the light we need, the light that once worked for us, is not to be found up there in the sky, and even if it were to be found in a star, we need more than starlight to illumine our way. We need a more intense light, a brighter light than some far off distant star if we are to find our treasure; the treasure that will enable us to live our lives more fully alive. So, we must return to the story and shift our gaze from the heavens and look more closely at the Wise Ones who traveled to greet the newborn Christ child. It's difficult to see past the star. We know this story so very well that it's almost impossible to find a new way of seeing. Think of most of the nativity scenes you've ever seen and there they are three wise ones, holding three gifts huddled, kneeling, bowing, offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. I'd always thought of these wise ones selecting their gifts before they left on their journey. But what if they came without gifts to give? I've done it. We've all been there. You arrive at some event and you realize that you should have brought a gift. So you look around your car or in your purse and you find something ,anything to give; finding nothing you might have to pop into the nearest drugstore or grocery store, whatever is open, whatever is handy to find something, anything to give.

Now the wise ones setting out on a long journey, would of course have brought along some treasures; if only to trade with the locals for necessities. So, what if it happened like this: They'd arrived, and there was this beautiful newborn child in which lay the hopes and dreams of a world gone mad with violence, greed and lust for power; this little child was the hope of the world.

Touched, moved, overwhelmed by their encounter with the beauty of this child in the midst of the poverty and insanity of the world, they reached into their respective treasures and gave what they had as gifts for the child; generosity born in these wise ones as a result of an encounter with the beauty of a newborn child. Giving the most precious gift they have as a result of being overcome by hope for a future filled with something other than what has always been.

Little Graham was overcome with grief over the loss of his gift of gold. What could he possibly do? There was no time to go home and make another gold bar. In his heart the pageant was ruined. All was lost. He'd looked everywhere he'd been. He couldn't find the treasure he was expected to give. It was not where he had left it. So, Graham's Dad did the only thing he could do, he dug down deep into his own treasure to find a gift to give. He opened his wallet and looked at the bills; money, perhaps a few twenties would do the trick; modern gold? And then in a true moment of epiphany he saw it; the most precious treasure of all. It was a bit battered from its time spent in his wallet but it was after all his most valuable treasure; so he placed it in Graham's box so it could be given to the newborn Jesus.

When the time came, Graham bowed regally before the baby as he proudly lifted the lid of his beautifully carved box and offered up the treasure that lay inside. The congregation couldn't see what I saw, but it was a treasure more valuable than gold. For nestled there upon a bed of

satin, was a slightly worn photograph of Graham. What gift could be more precious than the gift of one's self?

We spend so much time looking to the heavens convinced that our treasure lies there in the sky. The truth rests more closely than we have ever imagined. Our treasure cannot be found looking up into the heavens. Our treasure lies deep inside of our being. Our treasure lies waiting to be given to a world in need of such treasures, as we have to give.

Shift your gaze from the heavens for the light of the world shines forth from you. Look around you and you will see the Light of the World in your neighbours. You are the light of the world! Shine forth, for the world has need of your treasures. You may not be prepared, you may not think you're ready, but deep within you lie the treasures this world needs, all creation is waiting for you. The most profound words spoken in any pageant are the words, "do not be afraid""fear not".

We've spent far too long looking into the heavens for treasure. The light is over here; and here; and here; in you and you and you, and me.

There's a quotation that has often been credited to Nelson Mandela, but it was actually written by activist Marianne Williamson. It speaks to the world's need of our very selves. Williamson writes:

"What holds us back in our lives is our fear.
 And sometimes when you take a very close look
 you find out that your fears
 aren't exactly what you thought they were.
 Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
 Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
 It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us.
 We ask ourselves,
 who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?
 Actually, who are you not to be?
 You are a child of God.
 Your playing small does not serve the world.
 There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other
 people won't feel insecure around you.
 We were born to make manifest
 the glory of God that is within us.
 It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
 And as we let our own light shine,
 we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
 As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.
 So it's holy work to move past your own fear.
 It doesn't just help you.
 It helps the world."

I suspect that Williamson's words speak to us so profoundly because we've all said to ourselves: who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Humility is all well and good, except when it gets in the way of generosity so when you hear yourself saying to yourself who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Remember to say right back to yourself: Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Fear not friends, for we are children of God. The treasure we seek to give lies not in the heavens, but here, deep inside. Open yourselves up and give the world the treasures creation needs. You are the light of the world. So shine! Thanks be to God. Amen.