

You know the feeling of waking up forgetting for a split second where in the world you are. I had that experience almost exactly a month ago when I woke up in completely unfamiliar surroundings. I had slept well enough the night before, though on the edges of my consciousness there crept throughout the night an unfamiliar sound. I couldn't quite place it. It was not far off, though at its source I knew it was loud. Rhythmic sounds metal on metal that would come and go at intervals I hadn't quite deciphered. It is so obvious now, but throughout the night it niggled my brain in the liminality between sleep and wakefulness. It was a cable car, and I was in San Francisco.

When I woke up, my plan for the day was... well I didn't have much of a plan. I just wanted to wonder around and get a feel for the coaxing of the Spirit in this strange and foreign place. I started my morning in the East at the port of San Francisco, the terminal for the ferries that cross the bay. Throughout the course of the day, I made a pilgrimage West across the city following not a star but the steel rails of the cablecars, street cars and trollys until I my feet stopped at the waters edge. I followed the coastal trail at sunset as the Golden Gate bridge shifted in and out of view among the trees with every curve in the landscape. I did not know that day that I would repeat that symbolic journey from East to West just a few short months later, this time leaving the most everything that I have known of home and community, much of it nurtured right here at St. Andrew's, and bearing not gifts, but all that I am and all that I have with my pup Alice as my sole companion.

I have talked much over the last year or so of the spiritual practice of becoming susceptible to the sending of the Spirit. Sometimes us preachers know not of what we speak...and so here we are here are.

Yesterday was the Feast of the Epiphany, a feast day that we have transferred and celebrate this morning. The culmination of the Christmas season, Epiphany is about the revelation of God in the person of Jesus; it is about the manifestation of Jesus as a light to the nations; it is about his appearing as the messiah; it is about the cosmic response to this One whose arrival is announced in dreams and visions and signs and wonders and earth and sky. It is about "God with us."

The Feast of the Epiphany is a celebration – a celebration that says something about not only who Jesus is, but about the God who sent him. It is a celebration about not only the God who sent him, but about the God who sends us, and so Epiphany is also something about pilgrimage.

We don't know very much about the pilgrims in this story from Matthew's Gospel, the Magi, only that they came from the East, whether from Babylon, Persia, or Arabia we don't know. While a later tradition identified them as kings, they most likely were not kings at all, but rather astrologers

or astronomers whose intimate knowledge of the stars enabled them to detect this disturbance in the night sky pointing to the newborn king of the Jews. We don't even know how many of them there were. Matthew doesn't say, but the tradition emerged that there were three because of the three gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Most importantly we don't really know what truly possessed them to undertake such a long strenuous journey – to undertake such a pilgrimage – in search of this child-king foretold in the heavens. Something in that star, HIS star, it reads, led them to consider the birth of this particular king to this particular people something to not only behold but to adore. Filled with joy, they came to this child and gave not only material gifts, but the gift of their very selves. They fell on their knees and honored him. They fell on their knees and worshipped him.

The Christmas season has already shown us that ours is a sending God. God sent God's very self into the world in the person of Jesus, and now as we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, we hear that God sent the Magi on a pilgrimage from the East by way of a star to show that God's presence cannot be contained among any one people in any one place – that God's promises will defy every border and boundary we humans construct so that those promises might reach to the ends of the earth. Our God is a sending God, and we like the Magi, are a people who are sent, sent to discover the presence of God in the world, point to that presence, and proclaim in word and deed, "God is with us."

Just under a year ago in March, I stood right here and made some bold proclamations about this sending God at St. Andrew's. I said that it was time for St. Andrew's to take some even greater risks in moving beyond the crossroads to that place where God is sending us, toward what is being coaxed forth by the Spirit. I said that it is time for St. Andrew's to become even more susceptible to the sending of this Spirit, while at the same time even more deeply rooted in context and place. I said that it was time to engage in some risky business as we re-embrace our call story as those who are sent, as those who are asked to, at times, pick up and leave all that is comfortable, familiar, safe and secure. I reminded us that this is something that is already deeply part of our DNA, because we are a church who has, over and over again, done things to defy the numbers so that we might not shrink back from the work we've been given to do by "playing small." I said that I think it is time to risk everything for some unknown destination known only to God toward promises that might not be fulfilled in our time – that probably won't be fulfilled in our time – knowing that in doing so one thing is for sure: We will be blessed and we will be blessing.

Sometimes us preachers know not of what we speak... and so here we are. What we didn't know at the time was that I would be walking with you on this pilgrimage beyond the crossroads only a short while longer. That risking everything meant risking, among many other things, not walking the rest of this pilgrimage we've been on together. And so in a few weeks, this sending God of ours is sending us on our separate ways, forever intricately entwined in the mysterious, love-bound ways of God, and yet separate nonetheless.

I wrote in my letter to you all last week that we are headed toward something new for all of us that is, I trust with all my heart, filled with the riches of God's grace in more ways than we can ask or imagine. I meant that. I meant that God is not just sending me; that you all are part of God's sending too, and this moment we are experiencing here at St. Andrew's, this transition, this is all of it part of God's sending. I also trust with all my heart that in this sending, as hard as it will be at times, we will be blessed and we will be a blessing.

I came across this poem yesterday by Jan Richardson. It is called ***For Those Who Have Far to Travel: An Epiphany Blessing***.* I think it might have something to say to all of us in this pilgrimage moment we find ourselves in.

POEM (below)

You each, each and every one of you, each and every one at St. Andrew's whether you've been here nearly 100 years or 1 day – each of you has a gift that you and only you can bring to this moment, a gift that is most needed for the mission of God in and through St. Andrew's as we all move beyond this crossroads. What is this gift that you and only you can offer? Know this: God has brought you to this place in this time in this moment to offer this gift most needed – the gift that you and only you can give before turning to go home by another way.

*<http://paintedprayerbook.com/2011/12/31/epiphany-blessing-for-those-who-have-far-to-travel/>

If you could see
the journey whole
you might never
undertake it;
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.

Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping
step by
single step.

There is nothing
for it
but to go
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:

to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star
that only you
will recognize;

to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions
beyond fatigue
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.

There are vows
that only you
will know;
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.

Keep them, break them,
make them again:
each promise becomes
part of the path;
each choice creates
the road
that will take you
to the place
where at last
you will kneel

to offer the gift
most needed—
the gift that only you
can give—
before turning to go
home by
another way.