

January 7, 2018

Matthew 2: 7-15; 28: 16-20

“Shimmering Faith: 2018 Star Word Selection”

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Prayer after Scripture

Ever-loving God, may your word speak to us in this time...from the word of Scripture... from the One to whom that star pointed that first epiphany, the living Word, Jesus the Christ – the One to whom we look for guidance in this new year...to that end, may the words of my mouth and the words of all our hearts be found pleasing and acceptable to you, O God, for you are our rock & our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

The new year always brings me to a life re-set which I have found becomes more important the older I get.

For all the younger ones listening to this sermon, take note – there will come a day when you have more years behind you than ahead of you – and in those days you begin to realize how important is to live life with purpose and how vital it is to use each day wisely – there also comes a point later in life when you wished you had realized this sooner in life...what I’m trying to say is...all of us can stand to take life inventory every so often – and the new year affords us just such an opportunity.

This re-set allows me to examine my life’s direction.

To ensure that the ladder I’m climbing is the right ladder so that when I reach the apex and view the horizon of my life’s denouement I’ll like what I see.

I’m trying to avoid finding myself in life’s waning years to be sitting on the porch, sipping an iced tea as it dawns on me that everything I’ve been striving for isn’t really what I wanted or needed or worse my path to get there was, to quote band Green Day, “down a *boulevard of broken dreams*.”

As Billie Joe Armstrong sings in that song, I don’t want to find at life’s end,

*“My shadow’s the only one that walks beside me
My shallow heart’s the only thing that’s beating
[Sometimes] I wish that someone out there will find me
‘Til then I walk alone”*

What I want, like those Magi, is to be part of encounters that “overwhelm me with joy.”
What I want, like the disciples, is to never forget Jesus call to live the gospel each day & Jesus reminder that I am not alone because *the word made flesh...the light which illumines the darkness and the darkness cannot put out...that God’s beloved Son* promises to be with me “always, to the end of the age.”

For it is in such encounters that life purpose, I believe, takes shape.

It is in such encounters that life begins to glow in such a way that direction is discovered.

It is in such encounters that faith shimmers and catches our attention.

J.B. Phillips in his work *New Testament Christianity* published a piece entitled *The Angels' Point of View*. Phillips prefaces the story with these words:

"It may give us a fresh perspective on life, if for a few moments we shed the limitations of earthbound thinking and detach ourselves deliberately from [modern] pressures and problems. ... [T]he pretence may be fanciful, but it may help us to let the real truth break over us afresh."

He then gives us *The Angels' Point of View*...

Once upon a time a very young angel was being shown round the splendours and glories of the universes by a senior and experienced angel. To tell the truth, the little angel was beginning to be tired and a little bored. He had been shown whirling galaxies and blazing suns, infinite distances in the deathly cold of inter-stellar space.

Finally, he was shown the galaxy of which our planetary system is but a small part. As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small, rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis-ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.

"I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"

"That," replied his senior solemnly, "is the Visited Planet."

"Visited?" said the little one. "You don't mean..."

"Indeed, I do. That ball, which I have no doubt looks to you small and insignificant and not perhaps over-clean, has been visited by our young Prince of Glory." And he bowed his head reverently.

"Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince, with all these wonders and splendours of His Creation, and millions more that I'm sure I haven't seen yet, went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?"

"It isn't for us," said his senior a little stiffly, "to question His 'why's' except that I must point out to you that He is not impressed by size and numbers, as you seem to be. But that He really went I know. As to why He became one of them - how else do you suppose could He visit them?"

The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"

"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping, crawling creatures` in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him

Such a thought was almost beyond [the little angel's] comprehension.

"Close your eyes for a moment," said the senior angel, "and we will go back in what they call Time."

[T]he little angel [opened his eyes when told to do so and], there appeared here and there on the dull surface of the globe little flashes of light, some merely momentary and some persisting for quite a time.

"Well, what am I seeing now?" queried the little angel.

"You are watching this little world as it was some thousands of years ago" [said] his companion. "Every flash and glow of light that you see is something of the Father's knowledge and wisdom breaking into the minds and hearts of people who live upon the earth. Not many people, you see, can hear His Voice or understand what He says, even though He is speaking gently and quietly to them all the time."

"Why are they so blind and deaf and [dim-witted]?" asked the junior angel rather crossly.

"It is not for us to judge them. We who live in the Splendour have no idea what it is like to live in the dark. We hear the music and the Voice like the sound of many waters every day of our lives, but to them - well, there is much darkness and much noise and much distraction upon the earth. Only a few who are quiet and humble and wise hear His Voice. But watch, for in a moment you will see something truly wonderful."

The Earth went on turning and circling round the sun, and then quite suddenly, in the upper half of the globe, there appeared a light, tiny but so bright in its intensity that both the angels hid their eyes.

"That was the Visit, wasn't it?" [quipped] the little angel in a low voice.

"Yes, that was the Visit. The Light Himself went down there and lived among them; but in a moment, and you will be able to tell even with your eyes closed, the light will go out."

"But why? Could He not bear their darkness and stupidity?"

"No, it wasn't that," returned the senior angel. His voice was stern and sad. "They failed to recognise Him for Who He was - or at least only a handful knew Him. For the most part they preferred their darkness to His Light, and in the end they killed Him."

"The fools!" shouted the little angel, "They don't deserve ---"

"Neither you nor I, nor any other angel, knows why they were so foolish and so wicked. Nor can we say what they deserve or don't deserve. But the fact remains, they killed our Prince of Glory while He was Man amongst them."

"I see the whole Earth has gone dark." Said the little angel. "All right, I won't judge them, but surely that is all they could expect?"

"We are still far from the end of the story of the Visited Planet. Watch, but be ready to cover your eyes again."

In utter darkness the earth turned round three times, and then there blazed with unbearable radiance a point of light.

"What now?" asked the little angel, shielding his eyes.

"They killed Him, but He conquered death. The thing most of them dread and fear all their lives He broke and conquered. He rose again, and a few of them saw Him and from then on became His utterly devoted [disciples]."

"Thank God for that," said the little angel.

"Amen." Said his senior. "Open your eyes now, the dazzling light has gone. The Prince has returned to His Home of Light. But watch the Earth now."

As they looked, in place of the dazzling light there was a bright glow which [shimmered]. And then as the Earth turned many times little points of light spread out. A few flickered and died; but for the most part the lights burned steadily, and as they continued to watch, in many parts of the globe there was a glow over many areas.

"You see what is happening?" asked the senior angel. "The bright glow is the company of loyal men and women He left behind, and with His help they spread the glow and now lights begin to shine all over the Earth."

"Yes, yes," said the little angel, "but how does it end? Will the little lights join up with each other? Will it all be light, as it is in Heaven?"

His senior shook his head. "We simply do not know," he replied. "It is in the Father's hands. Sometimes it is agony to watch and sometimes it is joy unspeakable. The end is not yet. But

now I am sure you can see why this little ball is so important. He has visited it; He is working out His Plan upon it."

"Yes, I see, though I don't understand. I shall never forget that this is the Visited Planet."

Phillips closes with these words,

"Imaginary? Fanciful? Certainly, but a good deal truer than some of our current [modern] thinking. We may not realise it at all, but we are right plumb in the middle of a vast drama, a tremendous battle between light and darkness. The whole core and essence of the Christian Faith, which many of us hold so lightly, is that Light Himself visited our darkness, scaled down to fit the human scene. It is true that since the Visit we know for certain that this rolling ball is by no means our permanent home; our destiny is higher even than that of the angels. But today, and every day that we live in the here-and-now, we are part of the vast Experiment, the age-long Battle, whose stage and testing-ground is the planet which we call the Earth."

To which, I'll add, we are not alone.

We are joined by Jesus the Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are also part of something bigger than ourselves for we are joined together, alongside each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

May we be faithful in stoking the embers of faith that we might be shimmering lights for each other to see.

To keep ourselves focused on shimmering faith in 2018, we are going to choose a Star Word to take with us into the new year.

The process is simple:

Ushers will pass a basket of words to you and you will reach in (shuffle around) – no peaking – and choose a word then pass the basket on down the row.

When the stars are passed we'll close with a few words then a prayer.

Ready?

Okay, I invite the ushers to come forward for us to choose our 2018 Star Word.

[play music during star gift selection]

After 2018 Star Words Have Been Selected

Consider how this word might be a gift from God.

Consider this word to be a chance to stop long enough to receive something from God.

Consider how this word speaks to you right now as 2018 begins, then give it some space to shimmer...

Consider how this word speaks to you in a few months then give it some space to shimmer....

Consider how this word speaks to you after having traversed half-way then $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the year then give it some space to shimmer....

Is it something you need to receive? To offer? To ponder?

Does the word mean the same at the end of the year as it did in the beginning of the year?

Let it shimmer...

Let it shape...

Let it shine in and through this new year.

Let us pray:

Ever-loving God, be with us in this new year and be with us as we listen for how this word speaks to us throughout this year...to that end, may the words on our cards and the words of our mouths and the words of all our hearts be found pleasing and acceptable to you, O God, for you are our rock & our redeemer. Amen.