

January 6, 2019

Matthew 2: 7-15; 3: 13-17

“What’s the Word? (2019 Star Word Selection)”

Rev. Lou Nyiri

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

What’s the word? – We’ll get to that – but first, let’s talk about words for a bit.

Words convey meaning.

Words are how we make sense of our surroundings.

Words can be created to help us describe life circumstance, as in the following anecdote a childhood friend of mine recently posted to Facebook:

Hyperapplianceaudioaccuity (noun) “That heightened awareness of one’s refrigerator, dryer, ICE-MAKER’s strange sounds...while performing normal tasks once you have determined it is on its last legs.

Words can be whimsical like the life-long game played between a grandmother and her grandchildren:

“What’s the word, Grandma?” little Billy asks (even at 28).

“Arms,” Grandma responds, “So spread the word and give grandma a hug.”

Words can prompt us to think in profoundly purposeful ways, like the following word, which Candace recently taught me:

Coddiwamble (verb) “To travel purposefully toward an as-yet-unknown destination.”

On this Sunday, when we celebrate Epiphany, we are all about words.

Specifically, “star words” – a tradition we, like many churches, participate in as we turn the calendar page from one year to the next.

On this day, we remember the star that led the magi to Jesus, by passing out cards that have stars and a word on them.

We then live into those words as the year unfolds.

“Star Words” become for us about opening up to the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives – that we might live into who it is God is constantly nudging us to become – not in some draconian guilt inducing way – rather in a practicing the presence of God sort of way that

prompts us to keep our eyes and lives open to how the word grows with us in this upcoming year – the word is a gracious gift helping us to see God in unexpected ways and places – and yes, that means while it can be at times challenging, the word we draw can also be life-giving and transformative.

These words help us to see new things – or to see the same things in a new way.

That happened with the Magi, with Joseph, the Disciples and Jesus in our Matthew texts this morning.

The magi had one thing in mind after encountering “the Word made flesh” they had a dream that taught them to go home by a different road because Herod had ill intent in his heart. Joseph having welcomed “the Word made flesh” into his family dreamt Egypt was the place to go to protect his family.

The disciples who followed “the Word made flesh” – along with John the Baptizer and anyone else along that river bank – saw God’s Spirit descend like a dove and alight on Jesus (the Word made flesh” and heard a voice from heaven say, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

When one encounters and is guided by the Word made flesh – one discovers a new way of relating in this world.

This encounter prompts us to periodically ask questions like:

Do we keep on the road we’re on or do we make a mid-course correction?

Do we keep doing what we’re doing because “if it’s not broke why fix it?”

Do we walk with trepidation into the new year because of what the last year brought our way?

Do we walk with anticipation into the new year because the way we see it *hope* will not disappoint?

Today is the day we continue our tradition of selecting star cards – a word that we take into the new year to ponder or perhaps pray over as the days unfold before us.

In one congregation, the pastor described the coffee hour on Epiphany Sunday as follows: “I stood in the corner and listened to some of the conversations. Almost every table was talking about the star words – how their word influenced their previous year and what new word they had just received. I marveled at God’s spirit working through paper stars. Like the Magi, these words allow us all to go home by another road, our eyes opened to God’s presence in and around us.” (Kristin Stroble in <https://pres-outlook.org/2016/01/star-words-a-spiritual-practice-for-epiphany/>)

The stories in this congregation (GPC) are not so different.

In preparation, I offer the following caution:

This word is merely a word written in ink on a piece of orange paper – there is nothing magical about this word – it’s not a miraculous word – this word is not gospel for your life in the sense

that it needs to be adhered to without derivation, without discernment – although it could be gospel in the sense that it might be a bit of good news which you need to hear.

Secondly, this word is not necessarily something you **have** to do – it isn't meant to induce guilt by making us add one more thing to an already full plate – it might be liberating in that it reminds you of something you need to *receive*. It may simply mean to sit in God's presence with this word and contemplate this word until its message becomes clear.

Finally, this word might not mean the same thing as the year unfolds. Sometimes the word doesn't even make sense until we've lived well into the New Year. Sometimes we find that what we need to is lose the word – find the word – lose the word then find it again... The point is that these words are intended to provide a starting point for reflecting on faith and in so doing these words will open us to seeing when and where we might encounter the living God in our day-to-day.

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.

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 2019 Star Word.

[play music during star gift selection]

After 2019 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 2019 begins...

Consider how this word speaks to you in a few months....

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

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?

What's the Word...wait and see.

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.