



Prayer. Christ Jesus, call us into your kingdom work of resistance and healing that our church, town, and nation might become your beacon of light to those living in darkness. Amen.

Matthew 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulum and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea,  
along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
the people living in darkness have seen a great light:  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.”

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

## “Home By Another Way”

“Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand”

Mt. 4:17b

When Erica Kristen was three years old she stole the baby Jesus from his cradle. Rev. Sally wrote: Several times she nabbed him right out of the manger the day of the first pageant rehearsal . . . I saw Erica Kristen scurrying right down the center aisle, tiny thief barely taller than the doll she carried tenderly. She snuck him away a couple of days later and no one noticed until her mother discovered the smuggled baby doll in Erica Kristen’s car seat. The safety harness wouldn’t fit around them both, or Erica Kristen might have succeeded that time. The third time she hid the doll in the trunk of the car and her embarrassed mother brought it back the next day, quite upset. In trying to reassure Erica Kristen’s mother Rev. Sally found herself saying, “Look at it this way. Erica is right, we are all supposed to want to take the baby Jesus home with us, and we’d all be better off if we tried harder to do it!”

We of course are not the first people of faith to be better off by trying to take Jesus, as God’s Guiding Light, home with us. The Wise Men from the east are remembered for that. The magi were learned men who studied the stars. They knew about the Hebrew scripture from Isaiah that foretold of God’s plan to raise up a king over Israel who would bring peace and well being to the nation. According to Jewish faith it was God’s plan from day one to shape a Holy people who would be a blessing to all the nations of the world. The star was a sign that Israel’s new king had been born. In his commentary, *Nine Miles Off*, Hebrew scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote: The wise men story line and plot come from Isaiah 60, a poem recited to Jews in Jerusalem about 560 B.C.E. These Jews had been in exile in Iraq for a couple of generations and had come back to the bombed-out city of Jerusalem. They were in despair. Who wants to live in a city where the towers are torn down and the economy has failed, and nobody knows what to do about it? In the middle of the mess, an amazing poet invites his depressed and discouraged contemporaries to look up, to hope and

to expect everything to change. "Rise, shine, for your light has come." The poet anticipates that Jerusalem will become a beehive of productivity and prosperity, a new center of international trade. "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn . . ." "Caravans loaded with trade goods will come from Asia and bring prosperity. This is cause for celebration. God has promised to make the city work effectively in peace, and a promise from God is very sure. Like Matthew, the wise men know about Isaiah 60. They know they are to go to Jerusalem and to take rare spices, gold and myrrh and frankincense. Most important, they know that they will find the new king of all peace and prosperity (Christian Century, Dec. 2001, p. 15).

What the wise men didn't know however, was that they were using the wrong text as their GPS guide. When God had spoken to the people in Jerusalem through Isaiah in 560 B.C.E. the city had failed to become a blessing for God. The text for the new thing that God was doing in Jesus, the Prince of Peace, that they should have been using, was from the prophet Micah, (5:2-4). "But you O Bethlehem . . ." Brueggemann helps us understand what God was doing in Bethlehem in the comment: This is the voice of a peasant hope for the future, a voice that is not impressed with high towers and great arenas, banks and urban achievements. It anticipates a different future as yet unaccomplished, that will organize the peasant land in resistance to imperial threat. Micah anticipates a leader who will bring well-being to his people, not by great political ambition, but by attentiveness to the folks on the ground (ibid).

The Wise Men's search for the King of the Jews was set within a dangerous political environment. It highlights the political wars that exists in every generation between two kinds of human communities: Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Jerusalem is the human community which seeks prestige, acquires wealth, and accumulates global power. It ignores the hope of God to unite all people in peace. It ignores the dream of God to bring well being to all people. It is self sufficient and holds within it the seeds of self destruction. Herod is Jerusalem's leader who represents humanity's resistance to change when it includes

loss of privilege, status, power and wealth. He embodies the elite who succumb to the human tendency to do violence when their established community of power is threatened. The resistance to change by the powers that be is deadly. Remember Herod's slaughtering of the innocents when Jesus was born? In contrast, Bethlehem is the city which seeks to build a peaceable and just human community by paying attention to people on the ground. Matthew records that in Jesus' campaign of resistance against the sin and corruption of the unholy powers in Jerusalem he issued a call for repentance. Repentance as used here means a change of direction, the gaining of a new set of values, the readiness for life under the transforming light of God (Texts for Preaching, p. 116). Bethlehem is nine miles south of Jerusalem. When the Star Seekers started out on their journey they were missing the mark. But because they took Jesus home with them, instead of returning to Jerusalem to give up his whereabouts to Herod so that he could kill him, they went home by another way.

Inauguration Day is upon us. Like the Wise Ones, we are knee deep in a volatile political climate of hate-filled rhetoric. As followers of Jesus, what change of direction can we make to adjust our 'nine miles'? In his Sojourners article, 'Resistance and Healing', Jim Wallis suggests that, with Brueggemann, our first step is that of turning our attention to people on the ground. 'Many people are terribly afraid because they are from groups who were attacked and targeted in the campaign by the new president-elect. We must take those attacks seriously by reaching out in solidarity and protection to those who are now most vulnerable— undocumented immigrants, black and brown Americans, Muslims, women of all races, and LGBTTTQ folks. Members of these groups have already experienced ugly incidents of hate and violence, including increased harassment, vandalism, and even assaults on children and others in the wake of the election results. If I read my scriptures right, those are the people that Christians and other people of good conscience should now turn to in solidarity and support. That is what Christians are supposed to do: Support the poor, the vulnerable, and those under attack.'