

Sermon: Journey to God
Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: January 6, 2019

God won't be lived like some light morning,
Whoever climbs down the shaft
Must give up earth's repleteness
For the craft of mining,
Stand hunched and pry Him loose in tunnels.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

This is the way we begin every new year in the church, with an account of the journey of the Magi to discover the baby Jesus born to be King, the one that even the stars themselves seem to be pointing to. When played by our kids in the pageant on Christmas Eve it's sweet but the story itself is filled with political intrigue and the threat of violence and it reminds me of that poem from Rilke – God won't be lived like some light morning.

We want God to bring light mornings and sunshine to our lives, to offer peace to our hearts and joy to the world, but the Christmas story from the very beginning and throughout the Gospels to its excruciating climax on the cross makes it very clear that God lived in flesh and blood, God in materiality is hard and heavy. It was no light morning for God and that is because there is a heaviness to the human heart, a vulnerability to the human body, a trajectory of human love in this world that is simply and plainly difficult and painful.

There are a myriad of ways to address this reality - we can isolate and insulate ourselves, check out of relationships and make very narrow the circles so as to minimize the risk of being hurt. We can hole ourselves up into gated communities of safety. We can numb ourselves with drugs and alcohol. We can pursue the light and easeful morning in any number of ways and in fact everything around us just that, a promise of how things and goods and products will make our lives easier and lighter and better and fixed – here buy this, try that, read this, post that, look like this, have one of these – it’ll be better and easier and lighter – everything around us promises to be better and easier and lighter and yet it’s all falsehood and in the end these efforts to avoid the pain bite us or purchase the solution, makes us less than human, withers us on the vine of living... for God won’t be lived like that. “God won’t be lived like some light morning, whoever climbs down he shaft must give up earth’s repleteness or the craft of mining, stand hunched and pry Him loose in tunnels.”

The experience of God, the way of Christ, involves a letting go of the superficial things of this life, the giving up earth’s repleteness, to some extent, and to grow spiritually to live out of the realm of the heart necessarily will involve a journey, a certain climbing down into the shaft, As Rilke puts it, and a taking up the craft of mining. We have to, at times, mine God out of the sorrows and sufferings of life, the messes and mistakes, the failures and failings, the violence and brokenness and as we do that we find that God is mining us out of the cramped cave shafts of our lives in turn.

This is what the Magi did. This is what their journey represented, a departing from their own nation, their own comfort zones of culture and religion and traveling to a foreign land and risking the wrath of the authorities there. They had to be open, wise and humble enough to recognize the God-Lived-One when they saw him in the poverty of a baby. They took up their journey knowing that God would not be lived like some light morning. They entered into the heart of the violent and powerful Roman Empire and encountered a murderous madman of a ruler who cared not who suffered in the effort to maintain his own power. The Magi returned by another route after paying homage to the true King and as they departed so too did Mary, Joseph and Jesus, as political refugees seeking asylum in another country, a country unlike Israel and America, Egypt was not building walls to keep them out.

This is how God came into this world and this is how God lived, not like some light morning, nor should we think that our journey towards being God-lived ourselves will be any different; for we'll have to pry God loose in the mine shaft of the darkness and difficulties of our lives. We'll have to journey beyond the comfortable confines of how we've organized and gained some semblance of control over our lives, climb down the shaft, giving up earth's repleteness and consider the craft of mining...

What does that look like for you in 2019? What is the relinquishing of the light morning that you must do to pry God loose in your life? What journey must you undertake – maybe it's an internal one that requires staying put physically. Maybe it's an external literal journey to some person or some place that you've felt you've needed to

do for some time. Maybe it's the risk you've been unwilling to take or the dream you've been unable to pursue. There are more important things than comfort and easefulness and security and control. There is the fire of God – the star – that burns white hot, that guides you to where you need to be but also purges and refines and catches others on fire as well. What is the shaft that you've been unwilling to climb down because you've been reluctant to give up earth's repleteness? There are stars out there in the night sky and inside you as well that will guide you to the God-Lived people in unexpected places and to the God-lived part of yourself that's probably like nothing you expected also for...

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