

Matthew 2:7-15

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

Matthew 2:19-23

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'

“On the Road Again”

January 1, 2012

Ray Miller

I retired twelve years ago from the Northern Illinois Conference, after having served for 43 years as a full-time pastor in the Chicago area. When I came to Fort Collins, I had hoped that there might be a place on the staff of First United Methodist Church for me, and there wasn't. So I did other things. I became a substitute mail carrier for three years, which fit right in with my training. It was wonderful, actually. I helped in a little tiny church in Pierce, Colorado once a month. I became a shuttle driver for Dellenbach Motors for a short time, and then one day, the opportunity came to become a member of the staff here at First United Methodist Church. One of the things I learned out of this was, it was the right time, and I thank God for the opportunity I've had to be on the staff here for five years. It has been absolutely wonderful. I have loved serving with Pastor Charles, Pastor David, Pastor Rebecca, Pastor Pam, Pastor Joel... I didn't prepare to say this, so I'm drawing on my memory..... and all of the other members of the staff. We have a wonderful staff, here at this church, and it's been a real pleasure and privilege to

have been part of it. So I thank you for the way in which you have welcomed me, and I ask for your prayers as I go on. Thank you.

So there they are, Mary, Joseph and the baby, huddled in a room in the back of the inn in Bethlehem, the journey ended. Only, of course, it wasn't. The word came - "Take the child and go to Egypt. I want you to go to Egypt, to the place where my people once dwelt. And I called my people out of Egypt, out of slavery, to receive the land that I had promised them. And I will call forth my son, Jesus, and you, out of the land of Egypt to open a new world, a world that he will show you."

Journeys. A journey that I remember vividly took place in 1990. Christmas Day, six of us departed O'Hare Field in Chicago, bound for a town in southern Sicily, Santa Croce Camerina. It was the town where my mother-in-law, Grace, was born, and she had always dreamed of going back to her place of birth with her two daughters, which they did, taking along two sons-in-law and a friend. Six of us, going to Santa Croce Camerina in the south of Sicily. We flew into Cantina and rented a van large enough for six people plus luggage, and I was the driver. It was a big van. Have any of you been to Sicily? The streets are not very wide, about as wide as the aisle. But I was driving the van.

We spent a few days there. Mom, as we called her, got to see the house, the little square cement house that was adjacent to equally-sized square houses sharing the same wall where she was born, from which town she left when she was five years old. It was great to be there, like stepping back a hundred years in history. It was like that. And then began the journey north, driving that big van through little towns with narrow streets, and a brother-in-law who couldn't see very well, who had eye damage in the war, and would sit right behind me, and periodically he would say, "Look, you just missed that by two inches." You know, after eight hours of that, it gets really old.

But we made some stops. We drove up Mount Etna in January. It's icy, and my mother-in-law said her usual things when someone would say "There's some ice there," my mother-in-law would sit in the back seat saying "God forbid." Well, we got to the top and discovered there were skiers up there, and smoke coming out of the crater of Mount Etna. Then we drove further north, and we stopped at Pompeii, to see the restored city that once had been completely immersed in volcanic ash, and then we went, now this you should never do in January, we went to the Isle of Capri. Some of you my age may remember a song about the Isle of Capri and how beautiful it is, a romantic song. In January the Isle of Capri is not romantic. It is cold. Wind blows. There is nothing beautiful about it, and most everything was closed. Then we drove around the Amalfi coast in a van on a narrow road, with a large cliff all the way around on the right-hand side. When someone was coming in the other direction, the other five passengers closed their eyes. I said a prayer.

Then on to Rome. I had done pretty well, and I bought a detailed map of the city of Rome so I could find the hotel where we were going to stay, and actually found it. Four of the passengers got out, and all the luggage, and then my wife and I were going to return the van, and I actually found where you return the van, except that it was a pedestrian street. How can you have a car rental agency on a pedestrian street? In Italy, you can. I didn't

know what to do. I stopped, and thought, "I'll walk over to the office and find out what to do with the van." I took about three steps. There was an Italian policeman standing there, shouting at me. "You can't....." I figured out he was saying, "You can't leave your van sitting there." I didn't know what to do. Well, he finally figured out what our problem was, and I finally figured out that he was helping us, actually, because he stopped a taxicab and indicated that we should follow the cab, and the cab would show us how to return the van. My wife got in the cab, and I'm following behind in rush hour traffic in Rome, around turnabouts. I was on the bumper of that cab, and then I thought, "Oh my gosh, June doesn't have her passport and I know she doesn't know the hotel we're staying in. If we get separated, I may never see her again in my whole life. So I was on the bumper of the cab. Finally he pulled over and indicated here was an underground garage where I was supposed to take the van and leave it. So I drove down the circular drive into the underground garage. Oh my gosh, I took the way for motorcycles. I couldn't get in. What to do? Well, panic, that's what I always do initially. I had to back out, and I prayed that no motorcycle would be coming down quickly while I was backing out. Now, backing a large van up a circular drive, I made it, and then went down the right one and parked the vehicle, wondering if by this time my wife was still up there somewhere and the cab driver was still there. Of course he was still there, waiting to be paid. Anyway, she was there. We walked back to the hotel.

You know, that experience, I believe, suggests some things about the journey that we're going to make in 2012. The first thing is, it's really important to know where you're going. Really important. Where are you going in 2012? You don't need to know precisely how you're going to get there. But the goal is important to know. How do you know? Some people say, I don't know. Well actually it's important to know.

Mary Oliver in her poem "The Journey" says, "One day, you finally knew what you had to do, and began." "One day you finally knew what you had to do." What is it that 2012 is calling you to do? It doesn't have to be something huge, it doesn't have to be something immense. But for every one of us, young or old, 18 or 88, there is something that we are called to do in 2012. The passion of your life. And as she says in her poem, "The Journey," "One thing, one day you finally do what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice." So many voices will always want to say, "Is that what you want to do? You can't do it." How can you possibly do it. How old are you? Where are you going?

Secondly, begin the journey. Oliver says, "One day you knew what you had to do, and began." A woman felt she was called to be a missionary in Asia. She had no idea how she was going to accomplish that. One night she had a dream, and in the dream she saw herself standing on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. Stretched before her were thousands of miles of ocean. But she took a step, and there was a rock for her to stand on. And she took another step, and there was another rock, and another rock. And another rock. The message? Step out. Begin the journey. Like Moses and the Israelites and the Red Sea. Take that first step, and you'll be amazed at what will happen.

Wayne Dyer in his book "There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem" says that when you make a decision in the will of God, the whole universe conspires together to enable you to do what you have to do. One day at a time. Like Abraham, whom we are told set out not knowing how he was going to get there, but going. Because he was a man of faith.

And thirdly, you will arrive at your destination. You will. Even though there might be many obstacles, just like they had on the yellow brick road, the destination will be achieved. The dream will be realized. Well, I'm sure some of you expected this entire sermon to be about my pending journey to Guatemala, and in a way, it is. When I was in junior high school, I went to a church camp, and one evening there was a Vespers service, and the speaker, a preacher of course, invited, challenged, us to consider a church vocation. And I remember then, when I was 12 or 13 years old, I remember saying to God, "I want to be a missionary." Now, in my mind in those days, being a missionary meant going to deep, dark Africa. Well, I didn't do that. I became a pastor. Maybe in another sense, a missionary. And sixty-some years later, that commitment that I made is coming to reality. And what I have discovered is, when a decision is made in accord with God's will, the Universe does conspire to enable that to happen. Support of family and friends. Finances necessary. A way of going. An invitation from the school. It's a miracle. It happens every day. So my journey in 2012 takes me to Guatemala, but the question now is, where is God calling you in 2012? And it doesn't matter how young or how old you are, God is speaking to you, and if you will listen, if you will let the passion in your heart be recognized and responded to, if you know something of where you think God wants you to go, and take the steps one at a time, you will arrive at the destination God has for you. So, brothers and sisters in Christ, on this January 1, 2012, Happy New Year. Amen.