

Epiphany Communion Sermon

Jan 6, 2013

Matthew 2: 1012

Those of you who are on FaceBook will know that there is a status you can choose with respect to your relationship. You can say you are single, married, in a relationship, or “it's complicated”.

Now, I KNOW things are often complicated. I know that.

And sometimes preachers are guilty of presenting things too simply. I know that too.

On the other hand, my experience is that, for example that face book status, my experience is that when people say “What's your relationship status?” and you say “it's complicated”

what that really means, often, is that “it's horrible. I should get out but I'm still here” it's not complicated at all. It's bad.

I was thinking about that this week, talking to a friend in the maritimes....whose relationship, she says, is complicated but when I asked about that it turns out it's not complicated in any way. It's bad. She needs to leave and she's not ready so she says it's complicated.

Thinking about that....

and thinking about the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings
and having lots of conversations with people about the groundswell movement around Chief Theresa Spence
and then I came to this text.

Lots of times in political discussions, we say “it's complicated”.

And it IS.

History is complicated

and so are people's motives and interpretations.

But.....

but often that becomes code for “so I'm not going to do anything”

So as I was mulling all of this over I found this quote in an article written to preachers, specifically preachers who are social justice minded.

“The appeal to complexity is the last refuge of the intellectual coward. Of course it's complicated, you hiss. We knew that sitting down. You're the one with the pulpit – un-complicate it for us now”

I am not able to un-complicate history and politics

but I can hold up the Gospel.

And I can look at this text, and say this:

The magi had a choice.

It wasn't complicated at all.

Do they tell Herod where the baby is? Or not?

Middle Eastern politics then as now is nothing if not complicated.

But these are the facts:

Herod was a tyrant. This is attested to not only in scripture but in extra-Biblical sources as well.

He was a servant of Rome – Rome who had conquered this land and under whose severe taxation and political control some got rich but most were oppressed

Rome had named him King of the Jews. He liked that. I picture him having that engraved on a plaque to be placed on his marble desk, a picture of him receiving the title, standing with the Emperor, smiling for the camera, in 8x10 glossy where he could see it and so could anyone else who came to the office.

Know what I mean?

He liked it. A lot.

Herod had his own wives (yes, plural) and sons (same) murdered.

And get this: when he was aging it dawned on him that no one like him, and that when he died there would be no one sad, no crying at his death. What to do, what to do? (think like Herod here....what would you do? Start being more kind? Nah, too much trouble.)

he gave orders that at his death

several of the best known and loved community leaders be rounded up and killed. That way, he reasoned, there would be crying on the day he died.

That's Herod.

That is the world leader we're dealing with.

That is not complicated.

There is no star shining on the scene.

And when he tells the magi to go and find the child, and come and tell him where he is so that he could go and “worship him”

that's not complicated.

It's hard.

It's scary.

The stakes for them are enormous.

They have a choice. Do they tell him, or not?

Do they, as they walk away from the palace, see him slithering over to his henchmen, hissing “watch where they go”

and do they see the clot of spied congealing at the edges of their journey?

Did they break up and each go a different direction, to throw them off? How long before they actually started following the star again?

When they finally get to the house did they take Joseph or Mary aside, slip them a package and say “here's the key to my place in Egypt if you ever find yourself in a bind”?

Choice after awful choice had to be made.

With less than full information

with no preparation

and in a foreign land where they were hardly inconspicuous.

Complicated? Oh yea.

Excuse for doing nothing?

NO.

Sometimes you just have to make a choice. And it's cliché but true: not to decide is to decide, and make no mistake: ambiguity and inaction always favours the powerful; support the status quo.

You decide where you stand. And with whom.
You decide when you kneel, and before whom.
Complexity is no refuge from this choice.

Today we gather at a table in the name of Jesus, who is for us the Light of the world.
His invitation is shining clear.
This table is bathed in the light of his vision; completely open, it is for everyone.

It is especially for those whom the world has maligned or forgotten. This is a place of radical acceptance and welcome.
Anything and anyone who gets in the way of that vision must be opposed. Respectfully, for they too are welcome at this table.

In our pageant Christmas Eve, when it was time to light the Advent candles one last time. I don't know if you noticed, but do you remember who did that lighting? An angel, and _____? Herod.

Because, bless his cruel heart, the Gospel is that he belongs too. We won't tell him where the baby is, and we will oppose him as best we can and with what we have to, if it comes to that, but he belongs too.

The Light of that star has that sort of effect, you know: it bounces around, as Light is wont to do.
The magi point to the star – the star points to Jesus and Jesus points to the poor.
The magi point to the star – the star points to Jesus and Jesus points to the oppressed.

You want to find me? He says....you want to find the Light of the World?
Look at those who are suffering.

And in the end,
The magi point to the star – the star points to Jesus and Jesus – this is the astonishing part – Jesus points to you.

YOU are the light of the world Jesus says. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp and then hides it under a bushel basket, no. You set it on a lamp stand. And it gives light to the whole house. In the same way, let your light shine, so that people will see, and give glory to God.

Today is Epiphany.
We celebrate the light that shines in the gloom that led the magi to the baby
the baby who grew to the the One we call the Light of the world.
He feeds and fills us at this table, until we look down and our own hearts and bodies and very lives are leaking light.

He does this so that we in turn will not hoard or hide that light
for fear of the Herods of our time
who are real
and powerful
but whose tyranny in the end is an illusion
when the light of truth, of respect, of dignity, of radical acceptance and justice
when that Light shines on us and from us
when we go home by another way by the light of the Gospel

the Gospel of the Light of the world
I believe with all my heart
that even Herod will come home.