

**THE OTHER WISE MAN**  
**Sermon Series: The Gifts of the Magi**  
**December 24, 2015 –Christmas Eve –Matthew 2: 1-12**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

There is a delightful little story written by Henry Van Dyke, entitled “The Story of the Other Wise Man” on which I base this sermon. Van Dyke, among other things, was a Presbyterian Minister as well as a prolific author. It posits that there were actually FOUR Wise Men seeking the Christ Child that first Christmas. The fourth Wise Man, “the OTHER Wise Man”, was named Artaban, and his gift for the new born King was the gift of the most perfect exquisite pearl. It was the pearl of great price, as the Bible calls it elsewhere. It is the pearl, representing the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God on earth, for whom a merchant sells everything else he owns in order to possess. Jesus’ story of “The Pearl of Great Price” underlies it. The Kingdom of God that is breaking into the world this Christmas is worth selling everything you own and have, forfeiting your fortune and your future, in order to obtain it. (Matthew 13: 46) Would you be willing to sacrifice *everything* to receive Jesus tonight??? Pay anything required? Do whatever it takes? The fourth Wise Man would. Would you?

My fondness for this story of “The Other Wise Man” is that he gets himself in trouble and never actually gets to the manger’s side on Christmas. As the Wise Men are making their journey from afar this fourth Wise Man gets distracted. He is dilatory. He stops to help people. He becomes overly engaged in their lives. He stops to help here. He stops to help there. In this Caravansary he is delayed. In this oasis along the way he gets off the beaten path in order to help someone else. He is always doing one too many things. And finally the other three Wise Men tire of this dilatory, diversionary, distracted Wise Man and they leave him behind to fend for himself and make his way to Bethlehem on his own.

Being a pastor, I entirely understand this; indeed I own and live this on a weekly basis. Am I going to be on time or am I going to take this one more phone call from this hurting person? Is my perfect plan going to come to fruition today or do I help this person and that person. Am I going to get my hospital calls finished right before Christmas or when I look into a hospital room and see someone I know, am I going to stop and pray with them...and then be late for whatever else I planned that day. I am sure I am very annoying to many people in that I am rarely on time. I have great intentions but something always gets in the way. As a family we were invariably late for church and that was because Mother always needed to do “just one more thing”. It wasn’t until I went to college that I realized there was such a thing as a Call to Worship –we always arrived late and were escorted up the center aisle by the ushers to the front seat, embarrassing me as a child, to the opening hymn. How nice of them playing that processional hymn just for the Broberg family. Likewise, we were always the last family to leave. The stray dogs and tumble weeds were rolling through the Commons area but the Brobergs were still talking. So I relate entirely to Artaban, the fourth Wise Man, the Other Wise Man. It is easy for me to get off on some cul de sac, some rabbit path, some distraction.

So Van Dyke’s story of The Other Wise Man has Artaban arriving in Bethlehem too late. The other three Wise Men have come and gone. The Holy Family have taken flight into Egypt and are gone. The manger is empty. The shepherds have returned to their flocks. The angels are winging their way around heaven again, not over Bethlehem. The skies are empty; the night, quiet. Artaban arrives too late to present his gift of the Pearl of Great Price to the little Baby Jesus. I get it. I understand. In too many ways I am The Other Wise Man, filled with great intentions, but never quite getting there.

And then as Van Dyke's story continues, Artaban spends the rest of his life trying to find the Baby Jesus. He endeavors to find the Christ Child in order to present his gift of the pearl of great price to the object of his worship and adoration. He travels here and there in search of God. He helps people here and there on his quest. He never quite finds the child because again and again and again he is delayed and distracted by seeking to help someone in need. But, you know, maybe the search for Jesus isn't a one time thing; isn't accomplished on one Christmas day or on just one Holy night. Maybe Christmas and the finding of Jesus isn't just for Christmas Eve? We like to pigeon hole it to just one night and one day, but perhaps it is more? Maybe it is living the ultimate sacrifice for the Pearl of Great Price? Maybe it is a lifelong journey, giving all of ourselves, a search for the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God over an entire lifetime? Maybe the fourth Wise Man knew something the other three did not? They came for a day and then returned home. He spent his entire life in search of the Christ Child. Which Wise Man got it right????

What's your Christmas like? At 6:35 a.m. tomorrow morning your clock goes off. You awaken to gather the family still in their PJ's to open gifts, by 7:35 a.m. By 8:05 a.m. all the ripped up wrapping paper is gathered in trash bags and placed out for the garbage. By 8:15 a.m. the perfect brunch is served in the kitchen and by 9:00 a.m. the dishes are all cleaned and placed in the dishwasher. You take down the Christmas Tree and the outside decorations, placing them neatly into well-marked boxes. The Christmas Tree retreats to the basement where it awaits its reappearance on the day after Halloween. The boxes of Christmas ornaments and decorations are all neatly placed in the attic by 5:30 p.m. You leave for Christmas dinner at a relative's house and arrive back home having eaten too much and go to bed by 10:30 p.m. in order to wake up early for the Christmas sales the next day. Black Friday 2.0 Perfect Christmas. Mission accomplished. All done perfectly and all put away until next year. *Except. Except. Except. Did you really have Christmas at all? Was the Baby Jesus really born in Bethlehem for you? Did you receive Him again? Or did you just show up, go through a few motions, pretend like the world pretends, that it celebrated Christmas, and then, Christmas all being conveniently put away, return back to the same old, same old? But maybe, you know, what I just described for you isn't Christmas?*

So Artaban, so easily distracted by doing good for others, gets to the end of his life and he still has not given away the pearl of Great Price to the Christ Child. And there is a young slave girl who is in need and in keeping with his character he gives away the Pearl to her in order to ransom her from her cruel captors. As he says: *"To rescue this helpless girl would be a true deed of love. And is not love the light of the soul? He took the pearl from his bosom. Never had it seemed so luminous, so radiant, so full of tender, radiant luster. He laid it in the hand of the slave. This is thy ransom, daughter (he said) It is the last of my treasures which I kept for the King!"* And it is then that he hears the sweet voice of his Master, the One whom he has sought throughout his life, the Christ speaking into his heart and into his life –*"Verily, I say unto thee, Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto ME!"* And it is there and then that this Other Wise Man realizes that every time he has done a deed in kindness to another, every time he has been waylaid to accomplish a bit of grace on the road of life, every time he has given of himself, every time he sought to give away the Pearl of Great Price to someone who needed it, every time he brought the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into someone's need, or misery, or loss...every time he was delayed on the journey of life in order to help someone else...he had presented the Christ Child with his gift...and he had not missed Christ that first Christmas...but he had had Him born and reborn into his heart...over and over and over again. Life and faith are always about the journey, not the destination. They are about the distractions along the way, not about the goal at the end of the day.

I love the line at the end of the Bible story of the three Wise Men and their presentation of gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. It notes, *“they departed for their own country by another way.”* (Matthew 2: 12) Perhaps there is **another way** to find Christmas. Perhaps there is another way to experience the birth of Christ tonight. Perhaps the path we are on will not lead us to love and light and peace by the manger’s side. Perhaps by December 26<sup>th</sup> we will realize that Christmas has come and gone and we have not found the Christ Child. Perhaps there is another way to come home to God this Christmas.

What if you took one of these poinsettias home with you tonight? And what if you prayed and you opened your heart to the Christ Child tonight. And what if you asked the Babe of Bethlehem to show you, to reveal to you, that person in your neighborhood who is alone, or hurting, or just in need of a little TLC. And what if you took that poinsettia and delivered it to them, and sat with them, and told them God loves them because of Christmas, and interrupted your own perfect plan of Christmas tomorrow, in order to follow a better way, a journey of the Spirit, a nudge and a leading from God. What if you took some time tomorrow to care for someone, to visit someone, to reach out in love to someone. What if you didn’t get all your Christmas decorations put away...but what if this year you really gave away the Pearl of Great Price...and in the bargain discovered Christmas...and a little baby...in a manger...born in love. Christmas comes when people get out of themselves and get into the LOVE born into the world.

The last lines of Van Dyle’s story are these: *“His journey was ended. His treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King.”* May you find the King this Christmas. Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*