

“Wise Enough”
Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12;
Matthew 2:1-12

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
January 9, 2011

It is good to be back. At Christmas time I took a little journey down to California to visit my wife's family. As I think back on preparing for that journey, it was pretty straightforward. I knew how we were going to get there, I knew what I needed to take along, I knew who we were going to visit, I expected that it would be a time of joy, a time to relax and refresh. The journey itself didn't seem too dangerous.

As I was thinking about the journey of the wise men, it seemed to me that not many of these expectations would apply. The wise men probably left without knowing exactly where they were going, who they were going to find, what was going to happen, the trip itself was probably not relaxing and probably dangerous.

Their reason for going, however, was that they had experienced something that helped them see that God was at work. They are called wise men. At least they were wise enough to notice that something was going on and they wanted to find out what it was. They wanted to go and discover what God was doing. Not many of my trips are based on this starting point, this expectation. Generally, I'm not going somewhere because I think God is at work.

They were wise enough to go. When they got to Jerusalem they were looking for direction. They were excited because they knew God was doing something. They found Herod. Now there's something that always amazes me about Herod. Somebody comes along and says, "God is at work," and the only thing Herod can think about is, "How can I stop this from happening?" I don't know what kind of person would think he can thwart God, and yet, I suspect it is more common than one might think. Anyway, they encounter Herod and we see how his is an opposite reaction.

And so we have these two reactions to what God is doing. And it seems it takes enough wisdom to make the right choice.

How did the wise men notice and know that star indicated God was at work? How do we notice? Does the stable, the star, or the gathering of faithful people help us see?

When I think about ways of doing things, how we might see something, one of the images that came to my mind was a door. When we see a door, we can expect that there's going to be something behind it. And in fact, putting a door up

here makes me feel like now I have to go through the door. I can't go around it because there's a door. It makes me think about the beginnings of journeys, going through doors.

The wise men were wise enough to know they needed to go on a journey and they found what direction to go. We'll talk more about that later. But first, there's a door, a starting point.

What are the doors in our lives? I think we have some. Every advertisement, in some way, is a door, saying that if you go through this door, it will be great on the other side. I suspect a lot of advertisements are a little like this door. You don't really need to go through it. You can go around it and there's really nothing on the other side that's any different from the side we're on.

There are doors in our lives that are real and do take us places. So here's a side door into our sanctuary. It's open, so maybe I'll go through and see where it leads. Once we take a door, where do we go? We tend not to go back. So we go on, we find our way, and all of a sudden we're not where we expected to be or know that we should be, and so we go exploring. We have to find our way. Oftentimes I think we're wandering through the corridors of our lives searching for the door we need. There's one place we find a door we need, the door into the sanctuary. A door that allows us to come in and find a bit of what we're looking for. And for me, it's the place I'm supposed to be.

For all of us, it's the place that God calls us to be. We have so many different doors in our lives, we have to decide which door to go in, how to get out of corridors in our lives and into the sanctuary that God has given us.

I think the story of the wise men and the Ephesians passage together help us see how to discern these doors. The wise men, when they saw that God was at work, worked with the expectation that they should go, that what God was doing was available to everyone. Even if they weren't Jewish, they just go.

For them to begin the journey, they had an expectation that once they arrived, they would have access to God or to what God was doing. They left their home on a journey into the unknown, hoping to encounter God at work, but not sure exactly where they were going. Along the way, they needed to gather some people together. They needed the directions that only others could provide. In Jerusalem they had to gather some people together who knew how God does things so they could find their way. They received the directions they needed allowing them to arrive in Bethlehem and pay homage to the new born King.

I think Paul is telling us the same thing when he's talking about the mystery of Christ now revealed, not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles. All people can share in the promise of Christ given in the Gospel. All people are part of the same body, the body of Christ. In Jesus, the Christ, God reveals the directions we need to know that we can all share in the wonder of God's grace.

But it's not only that it's open to all, but that we can come in and we can approach God. As Paul says, we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in Christ. Not only is it open to all of us, but through faith in Christ, by the work of God's son, we can approach with boldness and confidence. Recognizing grace is for all of us, and access to God is given us, we still struggle with finding the way, reaching our encounter with Christ and following Him.

We come together because along the way we need the help we can give one another to find this way. Paul describes what God does when he gathers us together. He talks about the church. Through the church we find the wisdom of God in all its rich variety and abundant riches of Christ as we determine which door to enter, which way to go.

Those three things can at least begin to open the doors, help us see whether this door, this way, is the one to choose. The door is open to all of us through Christ. We all have access to our Savior and our God. We are encouraged to go to God directly, confidently and boldly through faith in Christ Jesus. We are given the gathered faithful followers, the church, to help us find the way and to experience the wisdom of God in all its rich variety. We are invited to go through the door that leads us on our journey. As we begin the new year, we get to gather and recognize that the door we may come through is the one Christ opened for all of us that we might approach God boldly and confidently, to know as we gather together the wisdom of God in all its rich variety.
Amen.