

“Barb and Gifts” - Christmas 2B  
Rev. Jennifer Adams, January 4, 2009

I have to tell you that I thought about not coming this morning. Which isn't the strongest opening line I've ever had for a sermon but it's true. And not because of the weather. A few days ago a very good friend of mine died. Barb had been on our prayer list for a few months now and died after her battle with brain cancer. She was the Director of Heartside Ministries in Grand Rapids. She served the rich and the poor, the wealthy and the homeless, city leaders and outcasts, and she knew all of them by name. She was a remarkable human being and I and many will miss her dearly. Barb's funeral was yesterday and I'm in that place that takes sadness and disbelief and thanksgiving for her life and grief about her death and mixes those things all up together into one big mess of emotion and exhaustion.

And so I considered not coming this morning. You've probably been in this place before too. Sometimes you need a little time to soak up stuff like that and regroup. Some mornings you just need to burry your head in a pillow or stare out the window or do something that lets you be lost in that jumble of reaction that fills you up after a loss or some sort of major life experience.

But this morning when I looked out the window, I looked out into the sky. . . it was very early morning, still dark. I looked up and I saw a star. Shining right through the clouds I saw a star. Hovering. And bright. And beautiful. And as strange as this sounds, the star was calling to me. It was inviting me.

And so I followed it. And it took me south down 152<sup>nd</sup> Street onto Butternut. Past West Ottawa high school and Family Fare and eventually onto River Avenue. This was an incredibly accurate star. It took me over the bridge, onto Pine, past the Civic Center and through the downtown neighborhood onto Michigan. Then the star stopped moving and so did I. I turned into the parking lot of this place and here I am.

And sometimes that's how it happens. Sometimes it takes a star to pull us from wherever it is that we are, to pull us out from under our pillows to come and see, to come and see and be with

and be ministered to by the Body of Christ. And the good news is not only that the star is always here, guiding us, and inviting us, reminding us that there is hope to be had. The good news is also that all gifts are welcome here. I have no gold or frankincense or myrrh to offer you this morning. What I have to offer are wonderful stories of a beautiful human being, I was privileged to have known. I have my own passion for justice that Barb helped spark and I have my sadness that comes from the experience of loving a friend who is now gone. You bring things too, every one of you. And my guess is that if we pooled what we came bearing this morning we'd be a little short on frankincense but we'd have a whole lot of other things. Things like a whole lot of joy because babies have been born to the Grace family over these past few weeks. We'd have a load of thanksgivings – some of us are just back from wonderful visits with family and others have had some much needed quiet days at home. We'd have more than our share of laughter (I heard about the limericks at last night's choir party) and if we pooled all that we brought with us this morning we'd see that among us there is courage from those fighting illnesses, there are frustrations with job searches, there are gratitudes for recent reunions, reconciliations, and reconnections that have happened, there are struggles, disappointments, celebrations and curiosities about what life will bring next. And depending on who you are, this morning you came bearing either trauma or excitement about returning to school this week tomorrow.

And maybe when we offer our gifts that are our experiences, it's not so much like lining them up on a shelf one next to each other. Maybe this place under the star is a place where we put those experiences into something like a big mixer or tumbler, a holy place where the grief meets the joy and the laughter bumps up against the tears, and the recent losses run into the recent healings, and the courage touches the frustrations, and the grief meets the curiosity and excitement about what might happen tomorrow. Beneath the star is a people among whom stories come together and through this holy process of offering the Body is made whole. Because the gifts of ourselves have been given.

I don't know how it works and I'm pretty sure that even for the wise men there was a major dimension of all of this that remained mystery. But I'm glad for the star and I'd recommend following it as much as you can. Because like what happened to the wise men, after the

experience of being with the Christ, I guarantee that each of us will go home another way, touched by the gifts which the Body gives to us.