



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 5-6, 2019

“Star Watch”

By Rev. Keith Herron

REVISIT THE TEXT

Mark 2:1-12; <https://bit.ly/2FqvGOS>

BIG IDEAS RAISED

This is a great text by which we merge rationality with mystery, admitting there are mysteries out beyond our capacity to analyze. The psychologists call this “transpersonal” experience – something that cannot be fully understood with our thinking brains. This is raw experience beyond our ability to explain.

How did the travelers (Three? Who knows how many, the text only gives us three gifts to describe them), have an impulse to get on their camels and travel west to Palestine? What nudge of intuition did they receive that got them to load their possessions and these gifts to seek the one the star would unveil to them when they arrived? These non-Jewish believers acted on these impulses and together traveled by whim and by the light of a star.

This story of the foreign visitors likely provided the resources by which Joseph and Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt to escape the massacre of the innocents. One writer calls this “the slender threads” of life that play a vital role in weaving our lives. This unexpected gift from the universe opened the door of escape by which Jesus’ was preserved while other babies were slaughtered by the decree of the king.

QUESTIONS MEANT TO DIG DEEPER

- Have you ever acted on impulse? Some interior notion that you should act in response to this urge? Writer Malcolm Gladwell puts enormous emphasis upon our ability to take in an enormous amount of largely hidden information to make snap judgments (Cf. his book *Blink, the Power of Thinking Without Thinking* for more details).
- We are creatures of habit and occasionally closed off from the possibility of moving in new directions. “Not thinking” is a form of sleep walking. How does Isaiah’s prophecy shine a light on this kind of closed thinking trapped in the habits we’ve formed over decades of time? Isaiah 43:16-19: “This is what the LORD says— he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: ‘Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.’”
- Shameless self-promotion – here’s what I wrote in my book about how mystery and rationality are intertwined in our attempt to explain these kinds of events:

Even though we think it’s our willful determination that guides our lives, life has another wisdom and we are somehow inspired, guided or managed (even mismanaged) by unseen forces outside our control. Even though we exert our free will and make plans and set goals and proceed with full confidence as though we are in control, it also seems true there is a larger hand at work in directing us through life. Call it fate or blind luck, call it destiny, or call it the hand of God. Call it what you will, but know, there are events and plans we control and there are intrusions and surprises we don’t control.

I often use the phrase, “as fate would have it,” as a robust way of observing that sometimes we twist and turn on the events that occur in our lives recognizing that sometimes they are good events and sometimes they’re tragic. But on occasion, more often than we can know, even the tragic events have a tendency to act positively in our regard. Isn’t that how life turns for us as well? Sometimes we make the smallest imperceptible turn and our lives are spared. Sometimes our lives are put in the deepest despair. A job is offered or a job is taken away. We get a phone call and with it our lives are changed. Inexplicably our lives take a turn here, or a twist there, and the arc of our lives unpredictably shift and twist in a new direction.

[Excerpt from *Living a Narrative Life: Essays on the Power of Stories*, Keith Herron, Smyth & Helwys, 2019]

REVISIT THE SERMON

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