The Road Less Traveled

Matthew 2:1-12

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Introduction:

What did you eat on New Years' Day? Black-eyed peas? Collard greens? Ham or hammocks?

One of our big traditions in the African American community is eating certain meals for the new year. These meals symbolize our hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the upcoming new year.

Eating Black-eyed peas represents our desire to be prosperous in the future. Collard greens represents our hope that we win the lottery, hit BINGO and experience some type of monetary blessing. Pork symbolizes our dreams of continuous motion forward.

The New Year challenges us to personal transformation. 2015 invites us to seek better ways of being better people. 2015 encourages us to radically love all of God's people. What is God calling you to be and do in this new year of 2015?

But before we forge ahead, let's praise God for the simple fact that we are here! Please don't be dismayed, your very presence in this moment means that you have accomplished so much!

Someone went to sleep with the intent of rising this morning but for whatever reason did not. Everyone didn't make it into the promise land to see a new day but YOU DID!

Despite financial hardships, YOU ARE STILL HERE!
Despite losing your job, YOU ARE STILL HERE!
Despite a negative medical diagnosis, YOU ARE STILL HERE!
Despite the loss of a husband or wife, YOU ARE STILL HERE!
Despite folks counting you down and out and telling you to throw in the towel, YOU ARE STILL HERE!

Thank God you are still here and capable of experiencing the dawn of a new day! January 1, 2015 You were born again and in addition to celebrating the birth of a new year, we celebrate the birth of a new you!

The Situation:

As we begin this new year, our Gospel writer Matthew warns us about two types of people we will definitely meet this year!

Matthew 2: 1-12
In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.
In this gospel text, the writer Matthew shows us that there are two types of people we will meet:

First and foremost, we will meet Wise Men: In this new year, like Jesus you will come face-to-face with wise people who will love and adore you, people who will kiss the ground you walk on and people who would drink your bath water! You will meet people who's only attention is to support you. They will provide an empathic listening ear when you need to cry, they will rejoice with you during celebratory moments and they will help you become a better person.

I thank God for all the Wise Mean and Women we have here at Lincoln Memorial. There is so much collective wisdom in this faith community! Where would we be without the special golden nuggets that our Elderberries share with us day in and day out. I thank God for Mattie Simmons, Ronald Sampson, Horace Watkins, Elizabeth Perry, Georgette Cooper, Hurley Alcorn and many, many others who pave the way for our youth and young adults today. Let's celebrate the wisdom that we have in our lives.

But in addition to Wise Men and Women, you'll also meet another type of person in the New Year......

In our Matthew text, despite the fact that a little baby star named Jesus has just been born, the nightmare of inequality still remains. The dirty stain of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia continues to stain the fabric of American. Even if hope in the name of Jesus has just been born, Matthew reminds us that there is a wicked and evil King Herod who still sits defiantly on his throne, the Herod of predatory lending, the Herod of human trafficking, the Herod of political corruption, the Herod of an unjust criminal justice system, the Herod of police brutality, the Herod of unjust school systems. Herod continues to sit in the City Council, in the Mayor's Office, in the Governor's chambers, and even in the Pulpit!

One thing is for certain, even though baby Jesus had 3 Wise Men looking to love and support him, he also had a "Herod" looking to Kill Him. 2015 may bring a New You, but never forget there are still some sneaky "Hatin' Herrods" from 2014 looking to Destroy YOU!
The Complication:

How do you handle the "Herods" of your life in 2015?

The Resolution:

The 3 Wise Men provide a simple yet overlooked solution.

Matthew 2:12 - "And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road."

In 2015, I challenge you to travel a different road. Like the 3 Wise Men, don't go back home into the same 2014 mess!

Do the unexpected.

The Celebration:

A husband and wife were sitting at home one morning enjoying a hearty breakfast. The wife was sitting across from her husband at the kitchen table doing a crossword puzzle, while the husband was reading the morning newspaper. All of a sudden, the husband began reading a number of stories about theft and burglary in the city. Then, he began talking about a shooting that was featured in the paper involved a Black teenage boy. Then, the husband starting filling his wife in about a police brutality case involving the Chicago Police Department. Then, the husband started highlighting his dismay about political corruption in the mayor's office. Finally, after sitting quietly and nodding her head for what seemed liked hours as her husband shared these depressing stories, the wife finally looked up from her crossed puzzle and said, "Baby turn the page!"

On this first Sunday of the New Year, I just want to remind you to "Turn the page, Baby!"
January 1, 2015 represents the first page of your new 365-page book. Don't allow anyone or anything to take up space and content in the new story. You are the author of your new book.

What new path will you forge ahead? What road will you travel?