

Jan 5, 2025

Pr. Steve

Texts: 1 Samuel 2:18-20; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit.

*"I see you. I see you."* It's what the Wise Ones are saying. We really don't know many details about them. We think there are three—because there were three gifts—but there may have been eleven of them. Where they came from, we don't know. What inspired them? We're told it's a star. But the crucial thing is that they discern something of significance is happening, from afar, and they pay attention. They devoted themselves and their resources to making this journey.

I don't think in our country or society we offer any awards for Wisdom. Am I right? I mean annually: *"Here are the 15 wisest people in our country who have so much to offer. We need to pay attention to them."* It's not even a category, is it? (last time I checked.)

And what did they come to do? Pay homage, fall on their knees, worship, pay attention, offer gifts, and leave. Why? Why? It's the same as we heard in the Pentatonic song, *"Mary, Did You Know?"* Wise ones, do you know? People of Peace, do you know? Do you know what's being offered here?

And the way we come to understand is not through the path or the channels of knowledge. Knowledge is extremely important, but knowledge is about acquiring things, accumulating building blocks, so that we can accomplish and achieve other kinds of things. Knowledge has its place, but it's always about gathering. *Wisdom is about letting go.*

Wisdom already says, "You and I have everything we need—within us, in community, in resources and creation, in possibilities, in imagination, in the arts, in science. We have everything we need. The crucial thing is, *'How do we unclutter ourselves to gain access to the Wisdom so desperately needed for these times?'*

There is some deeply painful, beyond ironic, connection that January 6th will forever be known as the 'Day of Coup and Assault and Attempting to Destroy the Country', and, it's also known as Epiphany—when the Wise Ones came to pursue the depths of what it means for us to become human. That's what this is about.

The Buddha offers a great, great insight— and you can practice this for the rest of the year—*'You don't have to go pursuing, endlessly seeking, and searching for the Truth anymore. This year you're off the hook; just give up your opinions.'*

And we instantaneously go (on the inside of us), *'I'm not going there. You can't take my opinions from me, right? I treasure those. I live by those. I shape my life and the life of others by my opinions.'*

That's why people are scared of church, because it's about Wisdom, and Wisdom comes by sinking in, and soaking into what we know, and giving ourselves the time to absorb these hidden mysteries. The mystery which has been revealed from beyond the ages, now brought into our life, and lives in community, so that we can become Real, not religious. *'I hope nobody accuses me of being religious anymore—because it's certainly not true of you. I know that.'*

No, we are here to become Real, because it makes all the difference. And that's what Wisdom is dedicated to—that unveiling, that revealing for us in a timely fashion. And at the core of it in every tradition around the world, there's one thing that is repeated over and over and over—and that is *'Listen! Listen! Listen for the Wisdom.'*

*'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.'* That is the very core of Judaism—The *Shema*. (We heard it in the text that Howard chose for the Gospel yesterday. [Mark 12: 30]) *'Listen.'* Tibetan Buddhism says, *'The only thing you need is to listen.'* Am I making my point? Listen.

We come together—the church—*Ecclesia*. The Greek word means *'the listening ones'*. We don't come to church to attend. We come to be formed and shaped through the listening, and the tasting, with the Wisdom that is needed for our times. That's why we gather—to listen—soaking in, absorbing.

That's all we need, technically, because as the Wisdom sinks in, that then is what shapes our choices, our decisions, our actions—so that we, like healthy trees, simply bear fruit. The tree doesn't even think about it anymore, right? It makes sure the roots are down deep and near the water and providing the nourishment. The fruit just [comes].. So we, in these times, shall we pursue and encourage wisdom with each other?

I don't know of any other path because it's getting so crazy, isn't it? Absurdly crazy. We've never known a time like this before. Only Wisdom is going to deliver us from just the ordinary insanity of this market-driven, commodity-making, crazed, exploitative society and world. When the human hearts are awakened to saying, *'There's got to be something else!'*, but the access path is Wisdom, listening to become Real, to become true, to become whole.

Therefore, I'm going to share with you a portion of the 'gospel' from *The Velveteen Rabbit*. I'll assume you remember a bit of the story. The Rabbit, seeing all the changes in his friends, being loved by the little boy, finally had to turn to the oldest and the wisest animal in the nursery—the Skin Horse (tired and weary, right?)

And he asked the Skin Horse, 'What is Real? Does it mean you have things broken inside of you?'

The Skin Horse said to the Rabbit, *'It was not so much like that—rather, Real isn't how you are made. Real is something that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but the child really loves you, then you become Real.'* The Rabbit wondered if there was pain involved. The Skin Horse told him frankly, *'Well, sometimes, but when you are Real, you don't mind being hurt.'* The Skin Horse told the Rabbit that the process of becoming Real took a lot of time. It doesn't happen all at once. *'No, you become Real gradually over time. And that's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or have to be carefully kept. No, no, it takes time. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints, and kind of shabby and floppy.'*

The Rabbit asked the Skin Horse one final question, *'I suppose you are Real?'* The Skin Horse was not at all bothered by the question as the Rabbit thought he might be, and he replied without hesitation, *'It was the boy's uncle who made me real. That was many, many years ago when that uncle was young.'*

But finally, the Skin Horse shared with the Rabbit, a priceless piece of information. *'Once you become Real, you can't become Unreal again. It lasts—for always.'*

That's the great mystery. Mystery isn't just the unknown and what we can't fathom—all those hidden things out there, like Dark Holes in space. No, Mystery is what's fascinating you. It is what is attracting you from the inside, longings toward things you've wondered about, cared about, haven't completely understood—but they are engaging your heart.

And that, friends, is the Epiphany invitation today—to pay attention to those things in your heart which make you smile, prompt a little joy, make you question. *But somehow you know*—if I pursue that my life will become richer and more Real.

So let it in. Just let it in, listen to it, absorb it, enjoy it. You don't have to do anything with it yet. Just acknowledge that you're being invited to become even more Real. It'll never leave you, and it will love you into the most deep and beautiful gift of who you already are. Just trust it.

*"Mary, Did You Know?"* Friends, did you know? *The mystery is happening in us now.*

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.