

Year A, January 5, 2020
2 Christmas
Christ Church, Mexia

God of all hope, help us on our journeys. Amen.

William Least Heat-Moon, a Native American who had lost his job at a college in Missouri, decided that he would strike out in his Ford van and discover what the rest of the world was like. His wife had recently left him, and he thought that there must be a better way, a better world, a better life out there somewhere.

He wrote about his experiences in his book, *Blue Highways*. The title comes from his decision to travel the roads shown in blue on the maps of the day. The better highways were marked in gold or red, but the blue ones interested him. They were the ones that led to places like Dime Box, TX, Scratch Ankle, AL, Remote, OR, Simplicity, VA, Nameless TN, Whynot, MS, and Igo, CA just down the road from Ono – not to mention the hundreds of other similar destinations. He ultimately traveled a distance equal to about one half of the world's circumference as he rambled throughout America.

"By his own admission, he left 'an age that carries with it its own madness and futility.' And he set out 'to the open road in search of places where change didn't mean ruin and where time and men and deeds connect."

His journey to find something that was missing in his life mirrors the journey that we are all making. We're not sure of the destination, but we know that we need to go. It's very similar to the gospel story of the wise men. They left their home to follow a star, which to them foretold the birth of a king – a king to which they felt they needed to pay homage, even though he was not of their country or race. They didn't know exactly where their travels would lead, and no doubt it was a difficult journey – no maps with blue or any color lines; very few, if any, road-side cafes with the delicious homemade food found by Heat-Moon; and they had to travel through alien countries that did not truly welcome foreigners, especially those that had once been their conquerors.

T.S. Eliot certainly wrote of the suspected tribulations of their travel in his *The Journey of the Magi* in 1927. It was the same year in which the noted poet, an intellectual and Nobel Laureate (1948) who had pursued the study of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy at Harvard

vigorously, became a Christian. The works he used as a basis for his poem were the French poem *Anabase* and the sermons and work of the Anglican preacher Lancelot Andrewes. A 1622 sermon of Andrewes seemed to have a tremendous impact on Eliot. It caused him to let go of his preconceived notions of who God was and how God acts and it caused him to see that the goal of his own life should be to seek and worship God. Thus the poem became a sort of road map for his and our spiritual journeys. The first part makes clear that it is not an easy journey, but rather one fraught with obstacles. The second part embraces the conversion, but in the end, the wise men see that what it means is a death to the former way that they have lived, but also the beginning of the new faith journey, one that will continue with ever-increasing enlightenment and understanding.

Joseph Campbell warns that "We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us." God has a purpose for each of us, but we have to let go of what WE think we should do before we can claim and follow the one that was meant for us before time. The only way to do that is to seek, God just as the wise men sought Jesus. They were seekers with a clear purpose; they were willing to go wherever they needed to go, overcome whatever obstacles they may have encountered. Unlike Herod, they did not sit and wait for someone else to do the work and come and tell him.

And yes, it may at times be difficult – what God wants you to do may be difficult. However, I am reminded of the story of lobsters by Brent Mitchell. Essentially, lobsters have from time to time to leave their shell in order to grow. Of course, without the shell for protection, they are quite vulnerable. "We are not so different from lobsters. To change and grow, we need sometimes shed our shells – a structure, a framework, (a belief, whatever) – on which we have depended."

In order to take your own journey to the next level, seek God in the places where God is found – in scripture, in prayer, in worship. Be open to the still small voice that is impossible to hear among the clatter of the normal life of this world. And when you hear it, be willing to put aside what you thought you should do – and be obedient to God's will. It is the way to true happiness.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.