

**Starting the Saunter**  
**Isaiah 60:1-6      Matthew 2:1-12**

Welcome to Epiphany Sunday.

Today is the day we traditionally celebrate the arrival of the Kings. Today is the twelfth day of Christmas (you know the song?) and in some traditions this is the day of gift giving.

This Sunday received the name “epiphany” because it was a day of discovery or enlightenment.

But today, and for the next few weeks, I would like to look, not at the destination, but at the journey.

After all, the Kings didn’t know where they were going until they arrived. They didn’t know about their journey until they had made it. They didn’t know their destination until they found it.

Let’s keep that in mind while we do some exploring in the idea of journey, which seems fitting as we have entered into a New Year.

By the way, that reminds me, how many of you have made New Year’s resolutions? You know, self-promises of changes you want to make for the New Year?

And how many of you didn’t need to make new year’s resolutions because you still have plenty left over from last year? Hmm...not surprising. Sometimes there’s a significant difference between “resolution” and “resolve”.

I want to introduce you to a rather obscure word in the English language. It is the word “sauntering”. The actual origins of the word are fuzzy, but there is one definition I really like. It comes from author/philosopher Henry David Thoreau:

*“Saunter” is a medieval term that comes from the words à la Saint[e] Terre, a way of describing pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land...those people on a Holy Pilgrimage. ‘There goes a Sainte Terrer’. A Holy Lander.” Someone on a Holy Pilgrimage.*

I believe that this “lost word” is an important word for us to rediscover! We are used to “run” to get places fast. “Gotta run to the store”, “run out doing errands”, that sort of thing. We know “hike” to cover great distances. “I’m taking a 20 km hike this afternoon”. And we know “mosey” ...it’s what teenagers do when they are in a group in a shopping mall. No other explanation needed.

Now I’m not REALLY against any of those, although I’ll admit that I never really enjoyed running unless it was a part of something else...football, softball, that sort of thing. And I have certainly done my fair share of hikes over the years! My father and I belonged to the 500-mile club for hiking more than 500 miles together over the years in the Boy Scouts.

But “saunter” is different. Sauntering is risk taking, life changing stuff. Sauntering is all about trusting God and following the Holy Spirit...and if you do that, the Spirit will take you places you never could have imagined going by paths you never knew existed.

That’s pretty much what the Magi did: Sauntered themselves into an epiphany.

But you see we’re really not very good at that, are we? For all that we claim or think we believe about our faith, we really want our Christianity to be nice and secure and comfortable. We may get stressed over God’s will for us, but we want that will to be the way WE want it.

Many, if not most of us, have become followers of “inverted Christianity” – instead of following the Spirit, we invite the Spirit to follow us. Instead of serving God’s purposes, we want Him to serve our purposes. We make plans and then pray for God’s support.

Let’s contrast that with a different vision of life: “*Otro dia, otra aventura*”. “Another day, another adventure”. I can’t help but think that those words resonate with one of the deepest longings in the human heart – the longing for adventure, for a full, rich, rewarding life.

The problem is, if we take the Holy Spirit out of our lives, the result can be pretty boring. It might be predictable, but it’s far from complete!

Too often good church people try to live a “safe” Christian life.

We try to remove the risk. We try to remove the danger. We try to remove the struggle...and we end up becoming caged Christians. Caged in our own insecurity, caged in our anxiety, caged in our own fear of what the full Christian life MIGHT be!

But I don't think that's the way we were created. That's not the way we were created in God's image!

Deep down inside we long for more. Sure, the tamed part of us grows accustomed to the safety of our self-built cage. But the untamed part longs for danger, for adventure. Admit it: a part of you longs to journey with the Kings, run to hear the news with the shepherds, sing the glad announcement from the heavens with the angels.

At some point in our spiritual journey the safety and predictability of the cages we have created no longer satisfies. We have a primal longing to be uncaged. And the cage door opens when we recognize the Jesus didn't die on the cross to keep us safe. Jesus died to make us dangerous.

Praying for safety, for protection is fine. I pray for my girls and this congregation on a regular basis. You may do something similar. But when was the last time you asked God to make you dangerous?

That is the daring of sauntering: Becoming a part of the pilgrimage. It means taking the risk of leaving the cage behind. That's what the magi did and look at the troubles they encountered...and caused!

Bear with me for a moment while I go off on one of my tangents. I have a question for you: Do angels yawn? No. I mean, really, I can't help but wonder if angels have the capacity to get bored. More important, I wonder if some of us are living such safe lives that not only are WE bored, but so are our guardian angels.

The Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard believed that boredom is the root of all evil. I can't help but agree. Boredom isn't just boring, boredom is wrong. You cannot simultaneously live by faith and be bored. Faith and boredom are antithetical...absolute opposites!

Moreover, I can't help but observe that many, if not most, Christians are bored with their faith.

Oh, we know our sins are forgiven and forgotten. We know we will spend eternity with God when we cross the boundary of life itself. And we are trying our best to live our lives within the guardrails of God's good, pleasing and perfect will. But still we have a gnawing feeling that something is missing.

I think that many, many Christians long to come out of their cage of safety and live dangerously for the Cause of Christ. Unfortunately, too many among us end up settling for spiritual mediocrity instead of striving for spiritual maturity.

Jesus speaks to that deep-seated longing for adventure by challenging us to come out of the cage.

That's what the kings did; they risked, they followed, they journeyed...they sauntered.

And that is what we are called to do: come out of the cage. The challenge is that there are many cages that hold us. Like Jacob Marley who built the links of his chain link by link, we have built our cages carefully around us. And there is not just ONE cage, but I can think of **six** (at least) that hold us in.

There is the cage of *responsibility*; all the stuff of daily life. Sometimes lesser responsibilities overtake greater ones. Sometimes our responsibilities become spiritual excuses that keep us from the adventure that God has destined for us.

There is a cage of *routine*; a subtle cage indeed. At some point in our spiritual journey, most of us trade adventure for routine. Now there's nothing wrong with a good routine, in fact the key to spiritual growth is developing a healthy and holy routine, known as spiritual disciplines. But there is a danger in the routine that leads to empty rituals.

There is the cage of *assumptions*; those are the ones that keep us from starting on the pilgrimage at all: "I'm too old", "I'm too young", "I'm overqualified". "I'm underqualified", "It's too late", "It's too soon". The list goes on and on. As we age, it's easy to stop believing and start assuming. We put 3-meter ceilings on what God can do.

There is the cage of *guilt*; If the phrase "the Devil's in the details" is ever right, it's here. It is SO easy to allow ourselves to focus on what we've done wrong in the past. Guilt turns us into reactionaries. Jesus came to turn us into revolutionaries for His name.

There is the cage of *failure*; and, ironically this is where many opportunities for sauntering begin. Why? Because sometimes our plans have to fail in order of God's plans to succeed. Divine detours and divine delays are the ways God gets us where He wants us to go.

I suspect that the magi understood that experience!

And finally, there is the cage of *fear*; friends, we need to quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death! To use a sports metaphor, we need to quit playing defense and start playing offense with our lives! The world, our faith, needs more daring people with more daring plans.

The magi from today's Gospel story faced all that, yet their pilgrimage and their story made a difference. Their faith and their witness made a difference. They took the risk and became saunterers.

As we enter into the New Year, I invite you to join me as we saunter through the next few weeks together, opening each of those cages to let the dangerous Christians join in the pilgrimage. But I'll warn you, the sauntering will change your life: once out of the cage, you can never go back.