

January 9, 2011 “Hey Guys...”

by Rev. Valerie Oden

Matthew 2: 1-23

Hey guys...

So begin millions of greetings each day – in school hallways, on blogs, YouTube videos, special interest forums, Facebook updates.

“Hey guys, how’s it going?”

“Hey guys... so, I bought this new I-Pad and I can’t figure out how to...”

“Hey guys... so today I’m going to see True Grit, I’ll let you know how it is.”

Sometimes the phrase masks in casualness what actually feels gut-wrenching, like this: “Hey guys... so it looks like I have melanoma. Pray for me will you?”

Or this, from an email my nephew sent out to friends a family a couple of months ago:

“Hey guys... so I went to the doctor today for my pre-op and you’ll never believe what he said. He said I don’t have to have the second surgery after all! He said my jaw seems to have corrected itself!”

“Hey guys” is a change in our language, a new social habit. Not everyone likes it. As one blogger put it with regard to this common new greeting:

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“The mutation of the English language is accelerating. How long until Obama opens a presidential address with "Hey Guys"? –YouTube comment

Nevertheless, it is what we have today: “Hey guys.” In fairness to the new social habit, it is clearly meant to be gender-inclusive, enfolding both male and female into its greeting.

Naturally, habits that develop through social networking ripple fast through our culture. Half of the American population is on Facebook. Personally I don't think you should feel left out if you're not. But I may not be the best gage of that, as I've been on it three times in the last year, the third time was last night. I thought if I'm going to talk about Facebook, I had better go see what's going on with it. Promptly upon exiting, I received an email saying

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“Welcome back to Facebook!” I felt like my negligence had somehow been spotted, like I had been called out for not being on the social train, like the social networking powers that be were no different from a pastor who sees a long-absent church member: “Welcome back to the fold!”

With or without me, Facebook is exponentially growing throughout the world. Maybe you saw the news story this week about Goldman Sachs investing in it, and being investigated. I don't think they can invest in any company without being investigated. Funny how those two words share the same root.

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In the NPR story I heard, one of the talking heads said that the value of Facebook would continue growing because it offers people connection, and that's what our world needs.

It offers people connection, and that's what our world needs. In an age when very few children get to enjoy "Sunday dinner at the grandparents", when families are spread out across the countries and across the oceans, we are more connected in a day than ever before through technology—cell phones, texts, forum blogs, online communities, Twitter, and yes, Facebook.

Technology is seeking to fill the void that we've created in our connections of presence. And to some degree, it is succeeding. Certainly in breadth, *perhaps* with a cost of depth. The shortened way of communicating gets to the point, while leaving out the presence-- the silence between words, the gaze of the eyes, the touch of a hand. It is what we have in this day of our human culture to fill the void of connection. But it's not *all* we have.

Enter the church. Churches offer connection that stretches both the breadth and the depth. Churches offer connection of presence woven by an eternal thread, an eternal presence, a vision of meaning and a clarity of purpose: ***love one another***. Churches offer a sacred story to be learned, explored, shared. Which brings us to the story of today's reading.

We don't know anything about the families of Joseph and Mary. We don't how they spent their Sabbath days, or how they spent time with their friends.

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But imagine for a moment that Joseph and Mary live in our day, typical young adults of today.

I wonder how Joseph might have began his Facebook update the morning after the angel dream in today's young American speak. Maybe it would have sounded something like this:

"Hey guys, so, this angel came to me in my dreams last night and said that Herod was after our baby and we should get the heck out of dodge. See ya later!"

How might the rest of the story unfold in today's world? Maybe word of Joseph's dream gets out and no toddlers remain for Herod to find.

Maybe enough people respond to Joseph's post who are skeptical, and Joseph and Mary stay put.

Maybe public outcry erupts against God for the special treatment Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus get in receiving a warning. I mean, if angels can warn *some* of imminent danger, then why wouldn't they warn *all*?

It does make one wonder a bit at our story. At least, it does me. It's not the first time in the Bible that God shows favoritism. But it might be the last. I mean, Jesus wasn't saved in a dream as an adult, told to go another route to escape the cross. Nor was John the Baptist before being

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beheaded. Nor Paul before being imprisoned. Nor Stephen before being stoned.

But Joseph and Mary were warned. And so were the wise men. Again, their warning comes in a dream from an angel: Go home another way, not back to Herod. So they did, an action which incited Herod's anger and brought about the slaughter of the innocent. I bet even Facebook would have been quiet that next morning.

Let's back up a bit in the story; these wise men have come following a star, the brightest star in the sky. Can you imagine their Facebook post the night before they left?

"Hey guys. So, you've all seen that bright star in the sky, right? Well, we're going on a journey. We believe that star is rising over the child who is to be king."

I can picture the responses from their friends: "Huh?" "What?" Or my favorite "lolwut", which means, "laughing out loud what ARE you talking about?"

But it didn't matter to them what their friends may have said. They were on a journey. They were seeking the child—not just any child, but THE child. And they entered Jerusalem proclaiming the same, even to the King, only to be met with a frightened king and frightened people. But that didn't matter to them either because they were on a journey with purpose. With clarity of vision. Following through with their lives. Bearing gifts.

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Paying homage. Honoring the little one. The way I see it, they were simply clear.

And I'm jealous. I'm jealous of such purpose and clarity the wise men showed. Traveling from how far away? Sleeping on the ground? Toting their gifts? Standing tall in the face of fear? Following a ...staaarr?

And when they got there, to the end of their journey, the reason for their travels, what did they get? The chance to kneel down and offer their gifts.

The chance to kneel down and offer their gifts. And that, for them, was enough.

Is it, for us, enough? Is there, actually, anything more?

In this age of geographic separation and technological connection, in this age when people are yearning for real presence one with another, what if we too simply kneel before one another, thereby kneeling before God, and offer what gifts we have?

Hey guys, there's a story we should know. It's sort of about a light that shines and guides and leads and calls and loves, no matter what. It starts out long ago, telling of a very large group of people who went through all kinds of things before arriving at a new land, and what happened after they got there. And then it moves to a young couple who had a child, and some

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very wise people who traveled to honor him. They followed the shining light until they found him, and then they knelt down, and they gave him what was most precious to them. And then they left.

The story goes on to tell of how this child grew up and changed people's lives. Deeply. Of how he died, but somehow he lives on. It's a story about presence. And vision. And meaning. Compassion, hope, and wholeness.

It's a good story for any day, especially for a culture seeking meaning and connection. And we get to spend this year learning it more deeply, together. *Connected. Kneeling. Giving. Serving. Loving.*

Is that, for us, enough?