

010619 Epiphany Matthew 2:1-12

“The Gospel is for _____!”

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Think of three people this morning. Picture three individuals in your head. Don't mention your three people loud, and don't point to anybody. But think, first, of the most annoying person you know. Have you got that person's face pictured? Now think of someone who's surly, someone ill-mannered and unkind. Do you know anyone like that? Finally, think of someone who's odd. Not in a creepy way, but someone who you think is just super-weird and strange. Are you picturing those three persons? I'm going to show you my three people, just to illustrate; but keep your three people to yourself.

Annoying: Tom Brady. Surly: Bill Belichick. Odd: any Boston Red Sox fan.

Now, whoever your three people are, my guess is that they're not exactly your favorite people, right? You probably don't like hanging out with annoying, surly, and odd people.

We all have people in our lives who are annoying, surly, or just odd. People with whom we don't want to associate. People with whom we'd rather not have to talk. People from whom we'd prefer to stay away. Whose faces would you put up there?

Whose faces would God put up there? Would God put any of our faces up there? Does God ever find us annoying? Does he ever get annoyed by our selfishness, pride, greed, or laziness? Annoyed by our repetitive sins? Does God ever see you as surly or unkind, in your worst moments? Does the Lord ever find us odd when we reject his ways, when we ignore his commands, when we devalue his blessings?

Would God put any of our faces up there? He could. He definitely could.

But when God looks at you today, he doesn't just see "annoying," "surly," and "odd." He sees "forgiven," "redeemed," "saved."

And not because we're such good, deserving, wonderful people. But because Jesus came for us. Because Jesus loves each of us. Because Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sins, and for your sins. Because Jesus sacrificed himself in your place, as your substitute, you are forgiven. You are redeemed. You are saved.

The miracle of Christmas is that God sent his Son into this world not just for the elite, not just for the righteous, not just for the spiritually healthy. Christ was born for all of the annoying, surly, odd sinners, including you and me. Christ came for everybody. Christ came for my three people. Christ came for your three people. The Gospel is for all of them. The Gospel – the Good News of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ – is for everybody.

Our Bible story for today makes this crystal-clear. Sometime after Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the East came to see him. They were strangers. They were peculiar. They were Gentiles, after all, not part of the chosen nation of Israel.

The Wise Men first visited King Herod, a paranoid, cruel ruler. "Hey, we're here to meet the new king!" they announced. King Herod couldn't have been happy with them. He would've put their faces up there, no doubt. And the people of Jerusalem, or those in Bethlehem -- if they had understood that the baby in the manger was their Savior, their Messiah – would they have been ready to share him with some strange foreigners? Did Mary and Joseph, trying

to get their baby on a schedule, think the Wise Men were annoying, maybe, with their camels and their bizarre gifts? Surly? Odd?

And, yet, God brought those Wise Men to the Baby Jesus. They followed the star. They were led by God himself to worship Christ, to honor him. Because God didn't just send Jesus for the Israelites. Christ came for everybody. The Gospel is for everybody.

Even these three. Even your three. Even you. Even me.

Grab a pencil or pen, and open your bulletin to page ____. Fill in the blank on the sermon title. And picture your three people when you're doing this. Write it in there. "The Gospel Is For Everybody!"

For Christians like us, that can be a tough concept to swallow. It can be even harder to live by. When people do us wrong, when people anger us, when certain people disgust us, our human instinct is to turn away, to build up walls, to keep our distance.

But the Spirit of Christ, living in us, would show us a new way. The Word of Christ, powerful and active in our hearts, would move us to a new approach, to a new attitude.

The Lord is teaching me today, through his Word: the Gospel is for everybody, even for Tom Brady, even for Bill Belichick, even for Red Sox fans. Say it quietly to yourself: the Gospel is for everybody, even for your three people.

There's a story told of a retired judge. He went to church every Sunday, and was a close friend of his pastor. One Sunday the two friends walked home from church together. The pastor asked the retired judge, "Did you happen to

notice who it was that knelt next to you this morning at the communion rail?" The pastor had recognized a man who was a recently-released convict, just out of prison. He remembered that it was the retired judge who had sentenced that man for his serious crimes. And there they were, kneeling together at the rail.

The retired judge nodded, and said, "I did notice who was next to me at communion." Then, after a moment's silence, he said, quietly, "Isn't that a miracle of grace?" "Oh, yes," the pastor agreed, "That our Lord would work repentance in that man's heart, and welcome him to his table." "I wasn't talking about him," said the judge, "I was talking about me."

I think the retired judge took today's message to heart. The Gospel is truly for everybody.

Try to look at three, or two, or just one person this week, and see in them – and in you -- what God sees. Jesus came for everybody. The Gospel is for everybody. And the Gospel is for you. Amen.