

Star Gifts 2015

Matthew 2:1-12
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God is still speaking, and we are still listening however sometimes, the problem is knowing what we should be listening to. Is God's voice in the words spoken by a loved one? Is that coincidental thing just a coincidence or is it God's leading? Does the closing door of a job loss or a relationship ending mean that God's window is opening someplace else?

It would be much easier if like the magi, the wise men, we just saw a bright star which led us right where God wanted us to be.

In the spirit of that star which led the magi to the Christ child, we choose star gifts on Epiphany Sunday. The ritual of star gifts encourages us to be aware of how God is still speaking to us and how God is leading us.

Star gifts are these paper stars on the platform and communion table. Each star has a word on it. The words are different spiritual gifts or qualities, such as "hope", "appreciation", and "wonder". There are 115 different possibilities however there are multiples of each word.

The First Congregational Church has been participating in Star Gift Sunday since my very first Sunday in 2009 so some of you have been choosing stars for six years. You know that sometimes when you pick your star gift, you are overjoyed because you have gotten one of those "good" stars. A star like "joy" or "love". Unfortunately, other star gifts have gotten the reputation of being "growing" or "improving" stars, such as patience or endurance.

Don't assume though that you will know immediately how God might be leading you with your star. My star gift for 2014 was consideration. When I picked it and even when I hung it on our bedroom mirror, I was not quite clear what it might mean. For months, I assumed it might have something to do with my sabbatical. I wondered what thoughts God might be encouraging me to *consider* as I thought about the books I would read.

I never considered I would be diagnosed with breast cancer the third week of my sabbatical. I'm aware that there are people who journal throughout their treatment. Others who blog about it. I haven't had the chance to reflect on what this diagnosis means for me. I've been too busy trying to get myself through treatment while I continue to be a pastor, wife, and mother.

What I am aware of though is that my cancer has not made others more or less considerate. People who were not thoughtful before did not become

more so. People who are *always* kind have been true to themselves and shown me a tremendous amount of love and support.

What I'm just starting to discern is that maybe my star gift was not about what I might read or about how others might treat me. Maybe by calling me to choose consideration as my star gift, God was calling me to be more considerate of myself, to be something beyond a pastor, wife, and mother and take time for rest and exercise, to take time to have fun and be playful.

I'm still considering that thought though!

What was your star gift for 2014? What thoughts did you consider as you prayed and asked how God was leading you with this star? If you feel comfortable, I invite you to share how God and your star gift have guided you throughout 2014. In order to allow more people to speak, I ask you to limit your sharing to a minute. I'll help with the timing, and Kathy and I will both help with the microphones.

Time of Sharing about Our 2014 Star Gifts

During the singing of "We Three Kings", everyone is invited to come forward and pick a star gift for 2015.

If you are not sure how God is leading you, pick your favorite color. Pick a star that is easy for you to reach. Pick a star that is under other stars. How you choose your star might feel random or arbitrary. Trust that God is guiding you to choose the right star for you this year.

If you are younger than 13 and you pick a star with a word you do not understand, then you can put it back and pick another star. While tempting, there are no do-overs for teenagers and adults. Also, feel free to choose a star gift for someone who is not here or tell them star gifts will be in the chapel throughout the month of January.

Choosing star gifts is a fun activity and also a deeply spiritual one as we ask throughout the year how God is leading us. Which is why it is important to place your star gift someplace you will see it often, your car visor, refrigerator, bedroom mirror, work cubicle, and to ask God - Is my star gift a quality I have and am called to share with others? Is my star gift a quality I will need this year in my life?

Hopefully, when you choose your star gift, you will think that it is both good and improving.