

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

We have come to the beginning of another year, and it is timely that we are celebrating the arrival of the wise men. They are following their hearts' desire. Their longing is to find the Saviour, the Christ of all the world.

Those of us that went to Sunday School remember the meaning of the gifts. The gold is for a king, the frankincense for a priest to burn at worship and the myrrh is for preparation of his body for death. Strange gifts indeed. These strange figures from the east represent the deep desire of the Gentile world (the non-Jewish world) to come and greet the newborn king. Each king is representative of part of the world. That's why they are all different skin colours.

One commentator suggested had the wise men been wise women the gifts would have been much more useful, maybe three casseroles.

It is easy to dismiss this story but from the other end there are Iranian traditions of star gazers who followed a planetary conjunction in 7BC and a comet in 5BC. It starts to do your head in that Jesus might have been born 5 years BC, or 5 years ahead of himself. In any case we see the result of finding their deepest desire in verse 10: "They were overwhelmed by joy."

But we don't need to go back in time to discover wise men.

This last week the world has lost a great treasure, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Along with his friend, Nelson Mandela, he helped lead South Africa out of apartheid and into democracy. He also single-handedly stopped much blood shed. There is footage of him running into a crowd about to, what they call, necklace a man for being a suspected apartheid spy. Necklacing someone is when they put a tire around you and set it alight. He was also, and you won't hear this from the media, a person of prayer. Once, when giving a press conference in front of the world's media, the BBC, CNN, ABC (all the letters of the alphabet were there), he said I'm sorry, but I have another appointment. "What," one of the media said, "could be more important than this?" "It's my prayer time." he said, and off he went. As an Anglican he believed in the importance of the nurturing power of daily prayer. If you asked him, he would tell you that it was this practice of praying, more than anything else, that gave him the strength to do all that he did.

Perhaps his greatest gift to the world was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The model for this commission has been repeated in over 22 countries including Northern and Southern Ireland, East and West Germany, East Timor, and our own Waitangi Tribunal.

Let me give you just a taste of its power. A South African woman stood in an emotionally charged courtroom listening to white police officers acknowledge the atrocities they had

perpetrated in the name of apartheid. Officer van de Broek acknowledged his responsibility in the death of her son. Along with others, he had shot her 18-year-old son point blank. He and the others partied while they burned his body, turning it over until it was ashes.

Eight years later van de Broek and others arrived to seize her husband. Hours later he came back to fetch the woman. He took her to a woodpile where her husband lay bound and forced her to watch while they burnt him too. Now van de Broek stood before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Desmond asked the woman what she wanted for justice.

Three things she said: I want Mr. van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my husband's body. I would like to gather up his ashes and give him a decent burial.

Second Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be mother to him.

Third, I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God and that I forgive him too. I would like someone to lead me to where he is seated so I can embrace him, and he can know that my forgiveness is real.

As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom van de Broek fainted. Someone in the room began singing Amazing Grace, eventually everyone joined in.

As we come to this new year, God has, like the wise men for baby Jesus, many gifts he wants to give us. He wants to lead us, like he led Desmond Tutu into our life's purpose. The key to discovering our purpose is to make a habit of daily prayer. No other thing that we do has the same power to transform our life and the of the lives of those around us for the better.

Find a place to pray, make a time to pray, come with an attitude of openness to God. I would love to help you pray, talk to me afterwards. God wants to give you gifts beyond your imagining so that, like the wise men, you might be overwhelmed with joy.

Let us pray:

Living God, we have come to a new year, and we thank you.

We bring to you our heart's desire:

To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly day by day.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen