

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

“Where do we find God?”

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Matthew 2:1-12

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At DaySpring there are five areas in our church life around which we share this work and life together: Worship, Hospitality/Community, Formation, Stewardship, and Missions. A time has come in the life of DaySpring to think openly and together, prayerfully and theologically, actively and intentionally about that aspect of the Christian life that is variously called missions, service, witness, or the work outside our walls and often outside our comfort zones.

I say “a time” rather than “the time” first because it’s not the first time this has been thought about at DaySpring. It’s not like missions has ever been “off the table.” Those who founded the church and were involved in the early years were involved in many different ways in the community: The church did various projects, raised and gave money away generously for the cause of missions, organized and sent mission teams, served and serve regularly at the Gospel Café, and so on. Fourteen percent of our church budget goes toward Missions. This number has increased every year for years. So it’s not the first time. There’s a context here, a story of a congregation that came together to do church and worship in a way that is healing and empowering so that we, in turn, go and live in the world as empowered, compassionate followers of Christ.

This is not the first time we have come together to put missions on the front burner. It’s also not new for many of us individually. There are many of us here in this room right now who are serving other people in this community and beyond in ways that would humble saints. You are serving out of a sense of call and duty in your relationship with Jesus Christ. This is not a new conversation for you.

I say “a time” rather than “the time” because this, whatever shape this takes, is not the beginning, nor the end of the conversation. Why should it be? DaySpring has experienced and expressed Christianity as an unfolding discovery of how and where God is moving in our midst. We try to stay “light on our feet” and cultivate an awareness of the spirit of God who moves us and shakes us and sends us out.

So, this is “a time,” not in any sense that we should over-dramatize: “**the** time.” But it does seem some stars are aligning that this should be a time of significance in our shared life together on mission. There are at least four stars aligning.

When we set out to do budget planning for this year, we began with the plan to dedicate fourteen percent, \$54,000, of our budget to missions. Some of that money was designated rather easily following past patterns of giving a certain percent to our partner organizations. For example, three percent or \$10,800 is dedicated this year to the Baptist General Convention of Texas. When you give a dollar, three cents is passed to them and they spend it on various ministries like BSU, Hunger Relief, and theological education.

We have done this consistently with several organizations. Some of that money stays here in Waco. Seven thousand, two hundred dollars go to our friends at CrossTies for their work at the Gospel Café and Talitha Koum, the amazing child nurture center in the Kate Ross area of the city. So this money was designated. What we came to realize is that our financial commitment to missions was greater than our plans, our vision, our intention for what exactly to do with it. Isn't that an interesting place to be? It was certainly an awakening place to be. It left \$7200 undesignated. We could have just added a bit to each partner, but we thought that this was a good opportunity to have some church-wide conversation about that and see what emerged. So that's one kind of star in the sky.

Another star that started aligning is the increasing awareness of the tremendous needs in Waco. Certainly, I say that very generally. Some of you have been aware of this for a long time. My awareness is increasing. I was very naïve about it. I bet I'm not alone. This is a small city that has big city issues. And maybe we can do some good, bring some relief, be a witness for Christ here in ways we haven't done before.

A third star in my view is generated from the reflections of the staff of the church as we sat down and talked through what makes DaySpring DaySpring. There are lots of ways of putting that, but one way is like this: DaySpring is most DaySpring at the intersection of Doxology, *Koinonia*, *Ascesis*, and *Kenosis*. And some of you are like, yep, that's right. DaySpring is most DaySpring when I don't understand what's going on. What that means, I think by thinking of an intersection, is that there is a center of gravity that pulls us together. We aren't all the same. Some of us are naturally drawn to Christian community and sharing our lives with others. That's *koinonia*. Some of us are more naturally inclined toward the spiritual disciplines of the faith and the training that produces spiritual growth. That's *ascesis*. Some of us experience our faith most when we are serving other people. That's *kenosis*. We are all different and come at the faith from different places. What we started thinking about was where can we find places where that all intersects . . . where a person experiences deepening authentic community with others, challenging, empowering practices of spiritual formation, and pouring their lives into other people as acts of service. Not everything we do will intersect at all of these. And not everyone will be at the place of intersection. But even ascetics need to have places of service to others. And even missionaries need community. And even extroverts need a deep inner life. So we learn from one another. And that place that brings us all together may just be a cross-shaped place drawing us to one another and to Jesus.

Add to these stars a fourth star that is aligning . . . conversations with you. It just seems like there is this question out there in the hum of this congregation: When do we do this stuff that we talk about on Sunday mornings? How can we bring our best thinking and our deepest prayers and our greatest commitment to our shared friendship and hospitality, formation, stewardship to mission? How does the contemplative life of worship take shape outside our walls?

These stars seem to align . . . a financial eye-opener . . . an increasing awareness of need . . . a compelling identity of the church . . . a movement of the Spirit in the

community. The primary question that is in front of us is not however, what shall we do? That is a derivative question. The question in front of us is where do we find God? It's the same sort of question that has been at the forefront of DaySpring's ethos every week of every year of every month in our existence. Where is God? How can we find, encounter, experience, enjoy, be open to, be formed by, learn more about, celebrate, and share the sacred?

There were some others who followed a star you may recall, with a similar quest in mind. Where do we find the one who is born king of the Jews? And their quest took them to a surprising place—not at all where they expected, perhaps outside their comfort zone, surely outside their assumptions. This King was not to be found where it was assumed kings would be found. And that was a surprise because where else is the new king found but in the palace baby nursery of the current king? So they knocked on the door of the King's palace in Jerusalem. 'Mazel Tov! Congratulations, King Herod on the birth of your son!' Can't you just see them, starting to unwrap a block of gold, frankincense, and myrrh . . . 'Congratulations, where is the baby?' Herod: 'There's no baby here.' 'Oh, yes, right. Well, then, have a nice day.'

Their assumed answer to the question "where do we find the king?" is natural. Had they been asking where do we find God, their answer wouldn't have been much different. In Jerusalem, of course. That's where God is. That's what everyone would have answered. Jerusalem, where they were, and Bethlehem, where they were going, were only a few miles separated . . . a short journey, but worlds apart. Jerusalem was the home of kings and priests, palace and temple. It was where God lived and where religious things happened. It was the place of the sacred. Many people made pilgrimages there to bring offerings and sacrifices and participate in the sacred, religious acts. God was in Jerusalem, in the temple, in the inner court, in the holy of holies, and so, sacrifices were there and priests were there and the holy days were centered on that place. This was the place to be . . . to come to find God . . . to find the sacred. The psalms of ascent in the Old Testament, Psalms 120-134, together paint a picture of a pilgrim coming from the outskirts of the nation to the steps of the Temple. "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place; This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:14-15).

The worldview of that time held an impenetrable distinction between sacred and common. There was sacred time . . . sacred space . . . sacred people . . . sacred actions. And God was found in the sacred. The division between sacred and common was sharp and unbreachable. God is here. Clean is here. Spirit is here. Goodness is here. Blessing is here. Spiritual growth is here. Prayer is here. Forgiveness is here. God lives here. God acts here. God is met here. Not there. Not then. Not them. Not that.

The religious system supported and defended the wall between sacred and secular. That's what it did. It kept sacred sacred by preventing anything common from entering the sacred. And it kept common common by keeping the sacred contained.

In light of all of this, think of what Jesus said and did.

Jesus touched lepers.

Jesus talked with women.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

Jesus told stories about mustard seeds, fig trees, Samaritans, vineyards, pearls . . . all of Jesus' language points out there to find God. The one time he talked about the temple, when His disciples remarked about how beautiful it was . . . He said tear down the temple, and in three days I will rebuild it.

Jesus told stories about sheep and goats and said that God would be found in people who were in prison, and hungry, and thirsty, and needed clothes, and the lonely.

He took common things like bread, wine, meals, and dirty feet and washrags, and awakened his followers to the awareness of the sacred in all things and all people. It didn't mean Jesus was some sort of pantheist who said, "All things are God." Rather, Jesus seemed to find God in all things, or at least, in the most common things and in the most common places, at the most common times.

Christianity is not a worldview that has sharp, unbreachable distinctions between sacred and common. Christianity is not going to church on Sunday to find God and then living outside the presence of God the rest of the week. Christianity is not doing God at church and then living for yourself Monday-Saturday. Christianity is not getting more people into church; it's seeing more of God in God's world. Christianity is not putting a mask on to be churchy here and then taking that mask off to be yourself in the office, the hallways of school. Christianity is awakening to an awareness of God in unlikely places, even you. We have biblical images for this. At Jesus' death the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This division between the holy of holies where God lived and the world was opened. It meant that people could enter the holy of holies. It meant that God could come out into the world. Later in the New Testament, you are called the temple of God, living stones.

Like the wise men, when we follow the star in the sky on the journey to find, join, and worship God, we may be surprised on the way at where God is. People who are very comfortable and habituated to find God at church on Sunday with church people doing religious acts may find God in some unlikely places in some unlikely people, in some unlikely moments, in some unlikely acts. But those people are also most likely to be able to experience and share God. Openness to the awareness of God in all places is the sort of spirituality that sustains very difficult, exhausting, costly mission. That's why it is so important. We have silence here in worship so we can learn to listen there. We have symbols here so we can learn to see there. We take and taste here so we can receive and offer the bread of life to the world. We may be surprised at where God already is and what we would have missed if we had not been open to the sacred in the common.

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle-aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: A woman threw the money in the till and without stopping continued to walk. A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly, he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3-year-old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally, the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only seven people stopped and stayed a while. About 20 gave him money, but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a handcrafted 1713 Stradivarius violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston and the seats averaged \$100.

Of those who hurried by that day on their rushed, harried way to very important things: seven stopped to listen. Only one recognized the master in their midst, of whom someone said, "he plays like a god." Another said, "his playing does nothing less than tell human beings why they bother to live."

Let us awaken to an awareness of the sacred in the common that transforms the common into sacred space. This is a Jesus-shaped spirituality. This spirituality that is often silent and expectant, empty and open, and apparently useless in the face of the great challenges of our time . . . this contemplative orientation of the whole life of prayer IS that by which the church can fulfill her mission to transform and save humankind. The first question is not what do we do? The journey of doing here at DaySpring may take any number of shapes, and may take different forms at different times. The first question is the same question we have always asked and will continue to shape all we do: We've experienced God here in this place with one another doing these things. Where else is God? With whom? In what? When you see and hear and touch and experience the sacred in a place and time far from what you might have expected, you walk away smiling; surely God was in this place, and I didn't know it.

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