

I imagine that pretty much all of us by now have put away any Christmas decorations that we may have displayed in our homes. If we had a tree we have either packed it back up in the box if it is artificial or taken our now dry and prickly tree to the road or recycling center or deep into the woods. Any decorations that adorned our homes have been put away and we are preparing ourselves, reluctantly, to return to full work schedules or back to school.

Even though the tree here in this sanctuary is dry and the poinsettias are down to a few, we still practice something counter cultural in this church and celebrate the full 12 days of Christmas. Unlike the culture around us we set aside one more Sunday to celebrate Epiphany, the day we recognize the Wise Men who came from the East to worship the Christ Child.

So even though the gospel of Matthew does not say that they were kings and even though the Scriptures do not tell us that there were three of them and the Scriptures also do not give them names, we gather one more time as a worshipping community to sing “We Three Kings of Orient Are.”

We do know, if we trust Matthew’s account, that these magi or wise men came bearing gifts. We are told that they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Their gifts to honor the Christ child inspire our own Christmas gift giving.

So this morning I invite us to reflect upon the best gifts we have ever received. Probably not gold, frankincense, or myrrh. To get us thinking I invite us into the story told by Kerry Patterson of the best gift that he says that he received.

Patterson says that his favorite gift never made it into the Sears Catalogue. It was never sold in any store. Never found on Amazon. More curious still, this gift, according to Patterson, sat in his memory, unopened for almost fifty years.

Patterson says that he was preparing for his granddaughter to visit his house for Christmas. Patterson went throughout his house to try to make the house safe for a curious child. As he was cleaning the floors he spotted a small shiny object on the floor, just under the living room couch. As he drew closer he could see that it was a dime.

He dropped to his hands to pick it up. And that is when the 50 year old gift was opened. As he sat on his hands and knees and looked at that dime, he was suddenly six years old in his mind. The dime that he had been staring at under the couch magically transformed into a dime lying under his grandfather's candy counter.

When Patterson was a boy his grandfather owned a corner grocery store and every day on the way home from elementary school Patterson would stop by to see him. Patterson says that his grandfather was always interested in what he was learning in school. According to Patterson, as the sole proprietor of the only neighborhood store, Patterson thought his grandfather was about as important as any person alive.

One day, when Patterson was at his grandfather's grocery store, he wandered over to the candy counter. Patterson got down on his hands and knees to look for an accidentally discarded coin. Grownups would occasionally drop a penny, and if you were lucky, you'd end up with a tasty treat. Only this time, Patterson spotted a shiny new dime. Ten whole cents!

He can still remember what he bought—one licorice whip, one red-hot jawbreaker, two sour cherries, one raspberry vine, and ten Whoppers—Whoppers were two for a penny. Patterson's grandfather smiled wide as his grandson scampered out of his store.

The next day, Patterson ran out the back door of school, raced down the hill, burst into his grandfather's store, and dropped to his knees in search of treasure. Then he crawled around and looked and sniffed, and probed, and hunted until—guess what? He found another dime. Patterson couldn't believe his good fortune! This time he bought his older brother an Oh Henry! candy bar and himself five pieces of penny candy.

And so it went. Every day he'd drop to his hands and knees, find a dime, and marvel at his good luck. Every single day his grandfather would smile wide as he ran from the store with his treasures in hand.

Patterson says that this was the box that fell from his memory shelf when he knelt down to pick up a dime the day his granddaughter was coming for Christmas. The entire rush of thought—complete with Whoppers, kites, and licorice whips—passed in a flash.

It was then that the adult inside of him returned. "Why Grandpa!" he thought to myself, "You put those dimes there didn't you!" Sure enough, at age seventy-two, Patterson's grandfather had gingerly lowered himself to the floor and secretly hidden a dime in a different spot each morning. He didn't do it for the thanks. He never told his grandson what he had done. He did it because he loved him.

On this Epiphany Sunday I invite us to allow a precious memory of someone expressing their love to us to be the gift that we receive this day. Memories of being loved are important gifts. Memories of times gone by are why I took my 85 year old Dad to play golf at what may be the worst golf course in South Carolina. But I invited him to play golf with me at Sedgefield Golf Course outside of Columbia that day a few weeks ago because that golf course is the place where I spent time learning the game from him and learning a lot of life's lessons as a teenager.

Today you drive by and you see a pretty pathetic golf course with rusty signs and poorly kept fairways. But to me I experience a cascade of memories that are important to me and me only.

The gifts that the Magi or Wise Men brought to the Christ child gave witness that this was a king. As we begin 2015, I invite you to recall important memories of people expressing love to you and allow these memories to help prepare you for the year ahead.

I hope and pray that you are able to recall good and affirming memories of being loved by another. But even if being open to recalling the past leads you toward some difficult memories trust that God can use those memories as well for something transformative today.

Today we will be installing the newest class of elders at Allison Creek. These 5 men and 1 woman now join the 3 women who continue on Session. But these 6 also join the hundreds of elders who have come before them and who sought to make faithful decisions as church leaders. The memories of past elders can be reassurances that God has guided faithful leaders in the past and that God continues to guide you and this church as well.

We celebrate the gifts of past memories but we pray that our memories help to prepare us for the future. Memories can be a gift that we learn to cherish.  
AMEN.

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-Patterson, Kerry, Vital Smarts e-newsletter, December 24, 2014, Vol. 12 Issue 52,

-Matthew 2:1-12 and Ephesians 3:1-13

-Given: January 4, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)