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## *Dreaming Our Way Home*

**A sermon by the Rev. Julia Mitchener**  
**The Second Sunday after Christmas – Year C**

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

Generally speaking, if you were looking for a “feel good” story last year, you would not have found it in an airport. 2021, after all, was the year when road rage took flight, quite literally. The year that passengers outraged over mask mandates sometimes vented their anger by physically assaulting ticket agents. The year when at least one group of flight attendants had to ensure their plane’s safe landing by strapping an unruly traveler to his seat. The year people all over the world missed long anticipated reunions with loved ones due to the so-called “Flightmare before Christmas,” as thousands of planes were grounded due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

It came as a pleasant surprise, then, when I read about one Jack Littlejohn, a young man, who, apparently finding his Virgin Atlantic flight from New York to London delayed, spent the extra time not throwing a fit at airline employees but getting to know an older passenger named Violet. Violet is a retired nurse from the UK who saves her money carefully so that she can fly to New York every so often to visit her daughter. Jack is a person of privilege who was flying first class. On a whim, Jack decided to switch seats with Violet. She moved to the plane’s upper cabin, where she enjoyed heated towels, complimentary champagne, and a recliner that doubles as a bed. Jack, meanwhile, settled himself in coach, where he spent the duration of the flight seated next to the toilets. Photographs taken by airline employees show him beaming broadly, if a bit self consciously, on realizing just what his random act of kindness had meant to 88-year-old Violet. [\[1\]](#)

Like the wise men in this morning’s gospel reading, Jack Littlejohn went home by another way. When his travel plans got disrupted, he dared to embrace another possibility. A possibility many would deem unwise, if not downright stupid. A possibility, though, that took an unpleasant, unbidden experience and turned it into an occasion for joy.

We often refer to the wise men as kings, though they were probably astrologers. If Matthew’s story is any indication, more than anything else, they were dreamers. People who took heed of a strange warning that came to them in their sleep. People who said no to the powers that be, putting their trust instead in a wild star zig zagging this way and that. People who, having spent time in the presence of terror, were still capable of being overwhelmed by joy. People who, having received an edict to betray instead followed an impulse to trust.

This is such a rich, evocative story, this story of the wise men— one with almost limitless implications for our lives as followers of Jesus. What strikes me most about it today, though, is its reminder that our vocation, our calling, as the people of God is not to be foot soldiers for the practical, the powerful, the reasonable, or the expedient. Not to be people who resign ourselves simply to following the loudest voices, the best laid plans, the conventional wisdom, the sure fire path to safety and success. Rather our vocation, our calling, as the people of God is to be dreamers—those who, when confronted by dangers and difficulties beyond anything we could have imagined, respond not by colluding with the forces of evil and oppression or by falling prey to the natural human tendency for cynicism and despair but by looking to the stars and listening to dreams, listening to God’s dreams for our lives and for our world.

For almost two years now, you and I—all of us and all our world— have been on an incredibly difficult journey, a journey not of our own choosing. A journey so painful and so arduous that at times many of us have thought about giving up. Pretty much all of us want desperately to go home, to return to a place where we have some

sense of security and well being, but we have not been able to get there—not fully, not yet. Often, the only antidote for our homesickness seems to lie in seeking self-fulfillment, in pursuing our own comfort and prosperity even when it conflicts with those of others. Problem is, of course, as our Christian faith reminds us, this is a dead end. This is a dead end. And yet we are not without options. Like the wise men (and like Jack), we can go home by another way. The way of abandoning the pursuit of power and domination in order to follow that one wild star guiding us along a gentler, more loving path. The way of seeing disruptions in our lives not as obstacles to make us bitter but as opportunities to connect with others in new and deeper ways, opportunities when we ourselves are feeling trapped, to help show others the road to freedom.

Jim Wallis tells a wonderful story about the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Back in the time of apartheid, when Tutu was preaching in the cathedral in Cape Town one Sunday, the dreaded South African Security Police came in and threatened him with arrest if he continued to speak. While any reasonable person would have either shut up immediately or gone on and surrendered himself to the authorities, Tutu decided instead to try to engage his would be captors. With a smile on his face and that famous twinkle in his eye, he told the police boldly yet genuinely, “Since you have already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!” The response of the congregation gathered in the cathedral was electric, Wallis says. Whereas before, people at the service had been hunched anxiously in their seats, dreading what they were sure was going to happen, once Archbishop Tutu addressed the officers, worshippers jumped to their feet and started dancing and singing. They sang and danced right out of the cathedral and into the streets, where police reinforcements actually retreated to give them more room to celebrate.<sup>[2]</sup>

You see, Archbishop Tutu was not trapped, as it turned out. He was not trapped at all. Jack Littlejohn was not trapped, though he did spend a long time in a rather uncomfortable seat. You and I are not trapped, either. There are always other options, options that will give us an “out” from being swept up by all the violence, scheming, greed, and degradation that mar our world.

There is the option to love.

There is the option to trust.

There is the option to switch seats, to extend an olive branch to an enemy, to pay attention to a dream, to dance. We, too, can go home by another way. Amen.

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<sup>[1]</sup> I read this story on [gtgoodtimes.com](http://gtgoodtimes.com) recently. It was originally posted on [huffingtonpost.co.uk](http://huffingtonpost.co.uk) and several other sites in December 2019.

<sup>[2]</sup> Jim Wallis shares this story in his book *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (HarperSanFrancisco).