

THE ROAD TO EGYPT

Text: Matthew 2:13-23

LHUMC 1/5/14

Stations of the Birth #7

I. Introduction

A. I begin with a confession that up until now, this last station, this last place on our Advent and Christmas journey has been a place I haven't ever really wanted to be. This is the one place on the itinerary that if it was up to me, I'd probably skip it and take an earlier flight home.

1. In fact, I realized that in the twenty years or so I've been doing this, until today, I've never given a message about the road to Egypt.

2. Like most of you, I suspect, I've always been comfortable ending Christmas where we were last week, with the wise men and Mary and Joseph and the shepherds gathered in wonder around the manger.

B. But Matthew, who is the one among all of the gospel writers who gives us the most realistic and unsentimental version of the story, gives us this one last place to visit.

C. And among all the places we have visited, this is a unique place.

1. This is the place that shows us that from day one, not only was Jesus a threat to those in power, but it also shows us the lengths to which those in power would go to eliminate the threat.

2. This is the place that shows us that the Christmas story did not by itself have the power to change the world, at least at first.

3. And this is the place that turns Jesus and his family into refugees, little different than those we see on the news in places like the Sudan and Syria.

II. So the bottom line is that being in this place has been tough for me. I worry about how to deal with being in this place without completely undoing the hope and joy that we've experienced thus far on the journey. In my struggle, I'm realizing some things about this road and this family we join today on the road to Egypt. Scholars will tell us how Matthew is making the connection between the past, with all of these shouts out to the prophets who foretold this part of the story, and the future, where we will see Jesus persecuted again and again on his travels down all the roads of his life. And that's all interesting stuff, but to me, this road is more personal than that. I'm realizing that like every other place we've been over the past few weeks, this place speaks to where we are and what

we experience on our own journeys. As I look at this road, here is what I see:

- A. This road is a road of darkness, there is no denying that—which is why it’s never been a road I’ve really wanted to travel in the time right after Christmas. There were no Christmas lights lining this road, literally or figuratively. I don’t know about you, but I prefer my roads to be well-lighted and filled with happy travelers on happy journeys.
1. But again, Matthew gives us the straight story here. No sugarcoating here of the fact that Jesus was born into a dark and dangerous world.
 2. And the fact that this story of Herod has been relived so many times over history through so many other rulers, we know also that the world continues to be a place of dark roads like this one.
 3. In the eternal picture, you could say that this road speaks to the inevitability that the road between promise and fulfillment can be a dark road.
 4. As we travel life’s roads, that is inevitable for us too—that sometimes our roads are dark roads. Stuff happens, some of which we can control, but a lot of which we can’t.
 5. As wonderful as it would be to “sleep in heavenly peace” every night, you all know as well as I do, that reality is often different.
 6. In the case of Jesus, it didn’t take long for the rest of the world to figure out what Herod already knew, that he was going to be a threat to the earthly powers.
 7. And so because of that, this is but the first of many dark roads that Jesus walked, the darkest of all being the one to Gethsemane and the cross.
- B. But amidst the darkness, I’m also realizing that this road is a road of faith.
1. I once read an essay about Joseph that was entitled “The Practical Dreamer”.
 2. That’s kind of an oxymoron, isn’t it? How can one who pays attention to his dreams so much still be called practical?
 3. If I paid that kind of attention to some of the dreams I have, I’d probably wind up in an institution somewhere!
 4. But for Joseph, paying attention to his dreams was an act of faith.
 5. He knew that he was hearing the voice of God in those angelic dreams.

6. And so again and again, he steps out in faith, doing what needs to be done, based simply on this whisper of God that keeps playing out somewhere deep within him.
 7. And so as he takes his family down this road and then eventually back home in the opposite direction, this road becomes a road of faith.
 8. In fact, this place in the story has been summed up by saying it is the place where faith wins out over fear.
 - a) On the one hand you have Herod, who in the face of his fear is running absolutely amok.
 - b) And on the other hand, you have Joseph, who because he has the faith to be tuned into the voice of God, is able to overcome his fear and save his family.
 9. So perhaps being on this road with Joseph and his family helps us to examine how we might become more receptive to hearing that still small voice of God, especially at those times in our lives when we are afraid.
 10. Because we have to be tuned in to hear God's voice before we can step out in faith to follow it as Joseph did.
- C. And then I'm also realizing that this road is a road of hope.
1. As we travel this road, we understand fully that we are never off of God's map.
 2. That because he sent his son into a world where he had to travel this dark and difficult road, we can know that he is with us on the difficult roads that we have to sometimes travel.
 3. Or another way to put it would be to say that if the roads of life were always easy, then we wouldn't need this child to be the Holy Child.
 4. One commentator says this: "When we remember the (Christmas) story, we need to remember this part of the story. This road reminds us that God comes to us in the worst places and the most painful circumstances to share our suffering, to care for us in the midst of tragedies. Christ has come to bear our sorrows. We have not been left alone." (Brett Younger, *Let's Keep Herod in Christmas* at www.ministrymatters.com)
 5. And now as we come to the table for communion, we remember that we have not been left alone.
 6. We remember not just all of the dark and dangerous roads that Jesus had to travel to get from the manger to the cross, we

remember also that through his sacrifice for us there, we have now been given the road of hope on which to travel in our own lives.

7. A road that began by going through all of these places at the first Christmas, continued to the cross, and now continues to move through our lives and into the world where we live out that hope by sharing the good news of our journey with others.