

*This sermon is based on the RCL (Episcopal Usage) – Matthew 2:13-15;19-23.*

Most often, on the Second Sunday after Christmas, we read the Gospel story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. There is an option; we don't have to read this story. The compilers of the lectionary give us the choice of reading about our Lord's episode of misbehavior at the age of twelve, when he remained in the Temple without telling mom or dad. For the life of me, I've never figured out why we have this option. It certainly has nothing to do with Christmas.

I suppose that the compilers thought that the story of the flight into Egypt raised questions that are only incidental. Some have questioned the authenticity of the story. It only occurs in Matthew's Gospel, and it is said that Matthew's agenda was to write a gospel designed to appeal to Jews. The theory is that Matthew wanted to paint Jesus in the theological likeness of Moses, the deliverer of the Jewish people. Moses came up out of Egypt to deliver his people. Matthew wanted Jesus to come up out of Egypt to deliver the Jewish people. For this to happen, he had to get him there. I personally think that regardless of whether this story is metaphoric, it has a lot to say to the Church today, and we ought to pay attention. What it says is that God's truth, God as Incarnate love in Jesus Christ, is always in danger from the forces of evil because there are always those with an opposing agenda who would destroy it. Nonetheless, God will work through those he chooses to preserve his truth.

In our gospel reading this morning, an Angel warns Joseph, Mary's husband, to flee to Egypt with his family, because King Herod intends to kill the baby Jesus. The Christian tradition is that Herod did kill hundreds of baby boys in an attempt to kill Jesus. Why did Herod do this? Because it seemed to him that Jesus was a threat. The fact is that Jesus was not threat to Herod, but Herod thought that he was. Herod thought that Jesus would take away his crown.

Throughout the years of Christian history, the story of Jesus and the work of his Church have faced numerous challenges from those who feel threatened by his truth. The times and manners of these challenges are legion. Any time that love and mercy and justice are let loose in our world, and the reality is that in Jesus love, mercy and justice are always on the loose, those with self-serving agendas are threatened. Yet when hatred yields to love, when selfishness yields to the good will, the work of Christ advances and we move closer yet to a world of unending peace. Never forget that peace is the promise of Christmas. Peace begins with goodwill.

The gospel reading today tells us that God intends to preserve his Church so that the work of Christ will continue. In the story, Joseph was the archetypal protector of the infant Jesus, keeping him safe so that he could do what God had sent him to do. So you and I are called to stand before the forces that would distort God's truth in Christ and be fearless even in the face of confrontation. The Gospel tells us that God will be with us

and will be our strength. Our obligation is to always seek the will of God in Christ by asking what would Christ do, and then doing it without fear of the consequences so that, at least in us, the work of Christ goes on.

The Gospel this day tells us that God's love, in Christ, is always threatened by those who are afraid to love as Christ loves us. The Gospel tells us that there are always those who will try to destroy it. In us, let God's truth prevail. *Amen.*