



Your Kingdom Come
Sermon on Matthew 2:13-23
Pastor Julie McCain; January 4, 2015

Please pray with me. Speak, O Lord in words that we can hear. Open our hearts to your word, and plant the light of your grace deep in our hearts. Amen.

In you I take refuge, our Psalmist says to God.

A different Psalm expands on the idea of God as our refuge:

“God is our refuge and strength our very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though its mountains tremble with its tumult.”

In the midst of all of that, we have no reason to fear.

And the idea of God as our refuge is something that I think Mary must have understood well,

I can't begin to imagine what she must have felt when the angel vanished after their first meeting, and she was left with news that she was pregnant with God's Son.

She has to have wrestled and wondered and wavered, all the while hoping against all hope that God would **be her refuge and strength**.

Or consider what fears must have emerged for her when Joseph found out about her pregnancy.

Or how she must have felt when she discovered that she would have to travel a long distance by donkey when the baby was nearly full term, and upon her safe arrival, found no clean and safe place to deliver her baby.

I think it's safe to say that worries and fears fluttered in these expectant parents' hearts.

But God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble.

And now the baby is born and the danger, over, and I imagine that Mary, holding newborn Jesus in her arms, breathed a deep, deep sigh of relief. She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart, and I think, too, that she learned along the way **that God was her refuge and that she truly did NOT need to fear**.

→But there is not enough time to treasure these things or to ponder them.

There is not enough time to breathe that deep sigh of relief, or to sleep in heavenly peace.

Another dream and another angel and Mary and Joseph are out the door by cover of night, carrying their infant and in fear for his life, soon to be refugees in Egypt.

The earth is changing the mountains are shaking, and the seas are truly roaring and foaming, and as Jesus' family flees for their lives, they know more than ever before what it is **to need a place of refuge**. → And thankfully, refuge is exactly what they find.

In children's versions, this is where the story ends, but unfortunately, our version is unabridged, and so we keep reading and learn that Herod has every baby boy under 2 killed.

A scene from the T.V. show *Friends* reminds me of how we might feel about this story. In that episode one of the characters, Phoebe, walks into her apartment while her friends are watching the movie *Old Yeller*, and everyone is crying. The family dog just fought off a wolf that was about to attack the family, and in the process, contracted rabies. All of Phoebe's friends have the movie before and know that Old Yeller will have to be put down.

But Phoebe doesn't understand. She says, "Why are you all so upset, it's *Old Yeller*, it's a happy movie!" When they ask what she means, she tells them that the movie ends when old yeller fights off the wolf. Apparently as a child her mother had always turned off the TV and shouted, "The End!" before the sad part came. But now Phoebe sees the actual, very sad, ending. She even tries to yell, "The End! The End!" but it doesn't work and, inevitably, the dog dies.

As we read our lesson today, still singing Christmas carols, and with the church still beautifully decorated for Christmas, we might have a similar reaction to that of Phoebe: "Wait, that can't be in the Christmas story! The Christmas story is happy!"

But this story, too, is part of Matthew's Christmas story, and in writing it down, he shows us the reality of the world that Jesus is born into, the reality of the world Jesus comes to save.

This world does not just need a pat on the back or a word of encouragement.

->It needs drastic measures like incarnation and resurrection.

And as we see Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men greet their newborn king with joy, we also see that this king's grace does not distinguish between

- male and female, between wealthy and poor, powerful or powerless, citizen or foreigner.
- It is grace that is truly for ALL people, and to the Herods and Hitlers of our world, who base their power on fear and privilege, that grace will always be terrifying.

But the trouble is that Herod's kingdom looks so powerful, and that's often the way the kingdoms of this world work. The darkness appears undefeatable, and so I don't blame you if you join the ranks of those who simply can't watch the evening news because it is so depressing and despair-inducing.

And I'll be the first to admit that the world's pain and suffering makes my heart ache, and anytime a terrible world event happens, it really can feel as if the ground beneath our feet is trembling and every force, threatening.

And at times like that, I change the Psalm to become a plea:

God, be our refuge and strength! Be the refuge and strength of those who are hurting!

The trouble is that Jesus' kingdom doesn't look very powerful with our limited field of vision. After all, its king died on a cross a few thousand years ago, and he didn't win any battles or conquer any empires before he died.

- It is a quiet kingdom of forgiveness and grace.
- A kingdom of death and resurrection and light that shines in the darkness.
- It is a kingdom that requires the work of our hands and our hearts.

→ And as a result of all that, it is probably not the kingdom that we would have chosen to be citizens and heirs of, (if we had the choice.)

Which brings us back to the fact that Jesus' kingdom is not the only one out there. Herod also has a kingdom.

And the story of Herod's kingdom and every other tyrant's kingdom after him raises so many questions for us, with the biggest one being: why?

Now I can't answer all of your questions in just this one sermon ☺, but I do want to get something straight. Tragedies like this absolutely break God's heart.

When we see or experience pain and suffering it does not mean that God has left.

It means just the opposite. In the story we hear of Rachel who is inconsolable and weeps for her children; Jesus weeps right alongside her and every other person who weeps.

Jesus is always with us in our pain, and he's doing more, too. He's fighting for us, and he's fighting against the darkness.

**God IS our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear.**

Still I can't unravel for you why Herod was allowed to have so much power.

What I can tell you is that Herod is dead and Jesus is alive.

I can tell you that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it, and one day, the light will snuff out the darkness entirely, and there will be no more Herods at all.

Amen.