

Matthew 2:13-23

January 1, 2023

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Are you tired and worn out? For many those first few days following Christmas are a time to recover from the preparations that went into decorating the house, baking the treats, sending the cards, wrapping the presents, preparing for family, and then cleaning up. Still others may be tired from traveling long hours and fighting hectic lines at the airport. Others may just be in a post-Christmas slump as it is hard to watch loved ones depart that are only seen once or twice a year. For others holidays and Christmas may just be a difficult and lonely season as they have no family, or their family has been separated for some reason. And others may just come today dreading the fact that it is now time to face reality again and the stuff of daily life that perhaps they could escape from for a short time during Christmas.

We need a jolt of something this morning and Matthew sure gives us one but perhaps not exactly what we were looking for only days after Christmas. Here we are still fresh on the heels of Christmas Eve, the excitement it brings, the awe we feel as the lights go out and we stand together singing "Silent Night" by the glow of flickering candles. Many of us in our drowsy and weary state of mind need to feel that same energy and excitement again and hear the good news of the birth of our Savior but instead we hear what on face value appears to be quite the opposite. Truthfully, where is the joy in this passage? Where is the hope? Where is the good news? Weren't things supposed to be all better now that the long-awaited Savior has come? After reading and listening to this passage it doesn't appear the birth of Christ has changed anything. We still have ruthless leaders who succumb to the fear of losing power and will do anything at all costs to protect their status and control. We have the holy family fleeing in the middle of night becoming refugees in another land seeking shelter and safety.

Yet as is so often the case in the Biblical account if we stop and let the Spirit guide us, we just may be able to find God at work and bring light to an otherwise dark text or comfort to troublesome words and painful images. That light is Jesus fleeing in the dark night from an evil ruler. The hope that emanates from that light is that He enters the darkness that so often surrounds and entraps us. He becomes a refugee for us. He lives under the threat of fear for us. He experiences what it is like to be weary for us. God doesn't sit high above the ugliness of human sin but in Christ God chooses to enter the very midst of it and experience first-hand that real life involves real pain and suffering. There is good news in that, although often hidden, God is at work faithfully watching over God's people and delivering them safely through the storm. At times that takes much longer than we would like, such as two years according to many scholars in this text, and even then, the holy family's plans are once again disrupted, and they must change course yet in the end God does not abandon them.

With a new year come all those resolutions. Eat healthier. Shed a few pounds. Hit the gym. Learn something new. It has been my own personal experience, many of those resolutions often get broken for one reason or another. Something happens that derails my lofty aspirations.

What we find in our gospel passage this morning is that God's faithfulness, covenantal promises, and steadfast love is never broken. God's saving action to God's people continues. Matthew masterfully weaves reminders of this into this morning's text displaying the light of God's restoration. Let's take verse 18, a direct quote from Jeremiah 31:15. The prophet Jeremiah is speaking in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple and the people of Israel being led into exile in Babylon. Certainly, like Rachel's lament, there was much grief and sorrow. Yet, if we look at the whole of chapter 30 and 31 in Jeremiah the prophet gives us these words:

- For the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people. (Jeremiah 30:3)
- But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, says the LORD, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for I am going to save you from far away ... For I am with you, says the Lord, to save you. (Jeremiah 30:10-11)
- For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the LORD. (Jeremiah 30:17)
- I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jeremiah 31:3)
- With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." (Jeremiah 31:9-10)
  - Hear the echoes of Psalm 23 and God the faithful shepherd leading his people beside still waters.
- I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow." (Jeremiah 31:13)

Amidst another empire wielding its strength and power, the light of God continues to shine. The word of God continues to speak. God will restore his people. Nothing will break the bond between Creator and creation. No empire is too big or too brutal. In time, they will crumble. In time, God will prevail. These words, promises, hopes certainly were the jolt the people in exile needed. These same words, same promises, same hopes are the jolt we need whatever road it is we find ourselves on. We are never alone. We are never forgotten. We are loved! There is always hope for a new year, a new day, and new life lived in the light of Christ who always shines through the darkness!