

MATTHEW 2:13-18

Jesus the Refugee

This is a story all about connections. We'll see later how Jesus connects with our world, but first of all this is a story about Jesus' connections with His people, with their history, with their life as the people of God. This is one of these stories that gets overlooked in the Christmas stories: I don't think I've ever preached on it till now; it gets forgotten in the aftermath of Christmas when we move on to other things, yet it is a powerful little story. Perhaps because it is a sad story in some ways, we don't look at it so often as the others. Yet there is so much in this little episode in the life of Jesus; there is so much that connects Him with His people and their past; so much that shows Him to be part of our world. His experience is so often repeated in our world that there has to be something of value here.

Timescales are not really important: we simply don't know how many months have passed since the wise men left and it doesn't really matter. What does matter is that God is still at work protecting His Son and taking the next step in His plan to bless and save the world. Jesus is under threat from Herod. There is no other evidence for this atrocity, but there is plenty of evidence of Herod's other atrocities; he behaved like this so often that it was entirely in character. He decides to get rid of the threat; "New king? Not on my watch!" So he orders that all the boys born in Bethlehem in the last 2 years be killed; it wouldn't be a huge number, but he is still plumbing the depths of human evil simply to protect himself and his grip on power. But Jesus had already gone: the family had already left for Egypt and safety; God's warning is heeded and they escape just before the killing.

Matthew ends both parts of the story with an Old Testament quote. Neither of these is a prophecy relating to Jesus, but Matthew takes the words of the prophets and applies them to the situation of Jesus. First, "*Out of...*" (*Matthew 2:15*) quoting Hosea 11:1; Hosea is reflecting on Israel's relationship with God as a son/father relationship; God describes Israel as His Son and talks about calling him out of Egypt as the beginning of that family relationship. It is all about Exodus and the days of Moses and the way in which God saved His people from slavery and how they were made into a nation and a people under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. If you want, you can create all kinds of parallels: it was Joseph who took Israel to Egypt; they settled into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, a variation of Jesus. So Matthew connects Jesus with His past, with the history of His people.

Secondly, "*A Voice...*" (*Matthew 2:18*) Again this is not a prophecy of Jesus, but a reference to another time in Israel's history. Israel is a divided nation and even at war with itself at times. Jeremiah writes of Israel, the Northern part of the nation, going into exile in 722BC, taken away by the armies of Assyria. Rachel was the wife of Jacob and the mother of 2 'tribes', and she is seen to be mourning the 'lost tribes' as the people are taken away into exile and lost for a time as prisoners! Her mourning did not last forever; the tribes came back and even in Jeremiah that sense of hope is expressed. Again Matthew draws a parallel between Jesus and His past as part of this people; there is a shared experience in His life-story; there are tears for the lost tribes, and tears for lost children!

Matthew is writing for a very Jewish audience; he is trying to connect Jesus with his audience's understanding of their history and their nation and who they are, their national identity as a people. This is Matthew's evangelism, saying to his audience that Jesus is one of them, that He knows and understands and is part of their history and their life as a nation today. So "take Him seriously; believe Him, trust Him,

because He is part of our life.” Just as He is part of their life, He is also part of our life. What would connect Jesus to us, in 2013 Scotland? We’ll see in a few moments!

Jesus – one of us.

Refugees? Here are some statistics from UNHCR about 2012:

- The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide: 45.2 million
- There were 15.4 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2012,
- Conflict and persecution forced an average of 23,000 people per day to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere, either within the borders of their countries or in other countries.
- Developing countries host over four fifths (80%) of the world’s refugees
- In 2012, the country hosting the largest number of refugees remained Pakistan, with 1.6 million refugees. Afghanistan retained the position as the biggest source country, a position it has held for 32 years. On average, one out of every four refugees worldwide is Afghan, with 95% located in Pakistan or Iran.
- Last year, 46% of refugees were under 18 years old. This was in line with 2012 but higher than a few years ago. Refugee women and girls accounted for 48% of the refugee population.
- An estimated 7.6 million people were newly displaced due to conflict or persecution, including 1.1 million new refugees- the highest number of new arrivals in one year since 1999.
- About 28.8 million people were forcibly uprooted people and displaced within their own country and are known as internally displaced people (IDPs).
- This equates to a new refugee or internally displaced person ever 4.1 seconds.

Jesus was a refugee; Jesus was forced to leave His home to go to live in another place for fear. As a child, He lived in a foreign country and depended on that country for a home, for protection, for security; did Joseph have to find work there? You can see from these statistics, just how many people share that experience in our world today and while it may not be our experience, personally, there is a profound connection with the world in which we live. We have no way of knowing how old Jesus was when all of this happened and how much of this was in His own memory, but it was part of His family life; surely something of this would shape His view of the world as Mary and Joseph told Him stories of His time as a refugee. His is a story that is also formed in the darkness of Herod’s atrocity and the depths of human behaviour and grief and mourning are there in His early days and while this is not His own experience of life, it is still part of the story. Jesus’ story is not protected from the real world; this is no fairy story where everything is wonderful and the story floats along untouched by bad things. Bad things happen in Jesus’ story too!

The Preacher in Hebrews chapter 2 (it is more a sermon than a letter!) makes great play of Jesus as one of us: *“Both the...”* (Hebrews 2:11) *“He shared...”* (2:14) *“He had...”* (2:17) Three times the same point is made: Jesus is one of us! The danger into which some early Christians fell was to concentrate so hard on Jesus as the Son of God that they thought that He only seemed to be human; because He was God, He could not be human (they assumed) and so could not be subject to human emotions or other human experiences. The problem is that if He is not one of us, then He can’t be our Saviour. Three times Hebrews tells us that Jesus is One of us: He and we are of same family, we are all human together; He shares our humanity, our flesh and blood; He had to be made like us in every way. We see Jesus being angry, happy, sad, even frightened; we see Jesus loving people, living by faith, having hope in His heart. So the emotions we feel and the experiences of our lives, He knows and shares and feels with us and for us in all of them.

He is One of us for 2 reasons:

1. To bring us to God – Jesus is the One who bridges the gulf between God and us, the gulf created by our sin, our waywardness, and our rebellion; He is the author of our salvation. The God Question has not gone away and no matter how much the militant atheist agenda wants to shut God out, He will not go away and human hearts are still reaching out for God. We are made to walk through life with God in our hearts and by our side and people are still reaching out for God, still wanting to know what God is like, still wanting to connect with what lies beyond and Jesus is the way; Jesus is the answer to that question. He is the One of us to lead us to God.

2. To bring the blessing of God into our lives – He is the author of salvation, He will destroy the fear of death, He will bring the forgiveness for our sins, He will help those who are being tempted! These are just four ways in which Hebrews describes the blessing of God in the verses we read and there is so much more. Grace, hope, peace, faith, love, joy – these are just some of the words that the Bible uses to describe the blessing of God on our lives. Because Jesus is one of us, all of this holds together for us. The key to this connection for us with the blessing of God is that Jesus is One of us. There are times in our lives when we feel that “no-one understands me!” or that we are alone in facing up to hard things; or that we are lost in some dark place of guilt and failure; or that we feel helpless in the face of so many hard things at once; or that God is so remote that He doesn’t hear, let alone answer, our prayers. Well, here is Jesus who understands every human emotion and situation; who is with us even in the darkest of places; who is able to help us; who listens to our prayers, even to the cries that have no words.

Connections: Jesus connects with His people, His past, their history; Jesus connects with our world and all that goes on, with our lives and all that we face; He brings us to God and brings the blessing of God to us and our world and or lives! He is One of us, One to trust, One in whom to hope!