

Preached by Dr. Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
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Isaiah 63:7-9  
Matthew 2:13-23

## CRISIS IN THE FAMILY

I want to tell you a story that won't have a lot to do with the rest of the sermon except to bring you into the reality that Mary and Joseph were flesh and blood people, and that their struggles in life were genuine and their fear was deep. But this is a story about newlyweds because the events that we read about today happened probably in the first two years of their marriage. It seems that there was a bride who had been walked down the aisle by her father. After the obligatory question, the father kissed his daughter. But before he could turn to walk away, the daughter kissed her father back and put something in his hand. The congregation erupted in hilarity and laughter. The minister couldn't see what the daughter had placed in her father's hand. She was returning his American Express card.

I don't know how Mary and Joseph could afford to do all the traveling they did. I don't know if it was Joseph's exceptional abilities as a carpenter or if it was the gifts from the Magi. What allowed them to do what really becomes an instant replay of something that happened long before? We're going to get to the death of the innocence, but before we do, did you pick out what the parallel was?

The Passover commemorates the exodus from Egypt. You get what Matthew is doing? The Israelites were taken out of Egypt—the first liberation from bondage—and Matthew tells the story of Jesus going back to Egypt. Any other parallels? There is an evil politician in each story—a pharaoh and Herod. How did Moses escape the wrath of this angry politician, this leader? He was placed in a basket with tar on the bottom, and he was floated down to the pharaoh's daughter. Jesus is taken out and escapes an evil intent. What else is a parallel? Moses and Jesus both live in exile for a while until a divine voice leads them out. There is darkness around. There's the death of children. There is exile, then there is hope. There's a crisis in the family that required the drastic actions of parents.

Many people call today's youth our hope for tomorrow. I believe we who are their caregivers are the source of that hope. For if we do not teach our children not only the stories of scripture but their meaning for our life (not their academic meaning), our children are bereft of hope. The economists tell me that this generation will be the first that probably cannot expect to achieve the lifestyle of the former. They are scared that they probably will make less; but when they come out of school, they already make more than their parents. So what is the deal for us in the story of Jesus and this evil pharaoh?

A second story—and this one does apply in every way to what is happening in Matthew's gospel. When Nicholas was czar of Russia, there was a group of economists who got together and began to debate how the people of Russia might have their

suffering eased. One of these was Dostoevsky. Even though these meetings between the economists were only exchanges of ideas, one day Nicholas had all of the participants rounded up, including Dostoevsky and his brother and 30 others. They were sentenced to death for their crimes against the state, and Nicholas himself because of their criticism. On the day of their execution, they were taken out and the first three were given white robes and a hood and were tied to a post. The order was given for the firing squad to take aim; and suddenly a horseman rode in and declared that through the mercy of Nicholas, their sentences would be commuted to exile in Siberia. One of the three went mad after that, the trauma was so intense. But the great author went to Siberia and began to write—his time, if you will, in Egypt to grow. He made a choice and he returned to his Russian faith with a new fervency, a new resolve, a new determination. He made a choice when he turned his resentment into something else; he transformed it into the beautiful literature that we enjoy and resentment became achievement.

I wonder if there is anybody here who has a little resentment in their heart. Resentment about the cards life has dealt you, resentment about a relationship, resentment about an employer or a colleague, resentment about where you are. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit reminds you that that resentment can become your achievement?

I know a lot of people have talked about our excessive commercialization of Christmas and our materialism. I wonder how many of us could say with a genuine fervency that we are content—that life is better than it has ever been, and the best is yet to be. If you are still under the delusion that if you make enough, acquire enough, get enough stuff—whether it be money or what money can buy—the Holy Spirit offers you another choice. Before all this happened to Dostoevsky, he says he was spiritually sterile. But he spent that time in Siberia (not a fun place) to grow. I wonder today if our spiritual sterility is connected somehow to our lack of moving forward in the faith. I wonder if our relationships that are at arms-length are part of what keeps us back in our infancy as disciples. Is the Holy Spirit calling you to gather around yourself some brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you can be yourself, where you can celebrate an intimacy that can only come because we are in Christ and Christ is in us?

Then I realized that this passage was also speaking to me. I've been doing this long enough that I've developed some pretty entrenched attitudes about faith. It's hard for me to see that the Holy Spirit wants Carl to be more flexible, more gracious, more understanding. Have you developed some really entrenched ideas that you are just not willing to think about except on your own terms? You see, all the other stuff—the intimacy, the spiritual growth, the freedom from the destructive habits that we keep so faithfully, that lack of contentment and the need to finally achieve something—they all come from being less entrenched, more open to what the Holy Spirit is saying. I want you to go home today and I want you to plan for a new year. If you feel that you are in exile, I want you to see the opportunities, the vistas that await you as God grows you into the disciple that you were always meant to be. We are all there, in one way or another; we all need to be delivered from our exiles in our Egypts. Hear the good news and trust God. Amen.