



1 January 2017
Christmas 2

Welcoming the Stranger – Welcoming the Christ

“Thinking allowed; thinking aloud allowed”

Minister: Rev Dr Robyn McPhail
Musicians: Diane Paterson - KK Clyde Foster - Kaeo
Readers: Jan Gough - KK tba - Kaeo

Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

Paulo Friere

Activity Space at Cornerstone

Children and young people, and those who like to do something while they listen, are invited to move around the Activity Space.

Plugging in

Gathering with all the Saints

All creation, all people: praise the Lord!
 STARS SHOOTING ACROSS THE SKY,
 SING GLAD SONGS TO OUR GOD!
 Rain clouds approaching, birds sitting on a branch:
 praise the Lord!
 SLEEPING CATS AND BARKING DOGS,
 SING NEW CHORUSES OF PRAISE!
 Rich and poor, leaders and followers:
 praise the Lord!
 OLD AND YOUNG, FAMILIES AND SINGLES,
 WE WILL LIFT OUR JOY TO OUR GOD!

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Hymn *Morning has broken* WOV91

Prayer

God of Loving kindness
 You are the source and spark of all love and delight.
 We come to you
 knowing that you have already approached us
 and knowing that you gather us in to the beloved community.
 We bring our hopes and offerings.
 We bring, too, our limitations, our wounds,
 our shame and our guilt for having been
 less than loving towards each other.
 We come to you with confidence
 knowing that you have already come to us
 and that your embrace
 gathers in all the lost
 and creates a safe home.

<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

Lord's Prayer

Symbol of God's Presence

Song *Land of hope and glory* [Jan's choice]

Clarifying our Purpose

Matthew 2:13-23

We begin with some reminders from the past. The paranoia and brute power of Herod remind us of Pharaoh. Joseph's attention to God through dreams reminds us of an ancestor from the time of that same Pharaoh, another Joseph. Fleeing to Egypt for safety reminds us of these same ancestors, Joseph's family and extended tribe, and their flight to the food bowl of Egypt in time of famine. Like Moses, Jesus is saved from a tyrant. Also like Moses he leaves Egypt in response to God's call. Rachel's weeping evokes her agonies in losing children and echoes weeping throughout the centuries before and after this text of Matthew. We weep at the slaughter of innocent children.

Yet these same reminders come with new insights in Matthew's telling. No mere repetition: it is time for a breakthrough, the beginning of a new way.

For with the Jesus story the contrast between brutal power and the life-giving actions arising from God-power is brought into sharp focus. King Herod is put alongside a new king of the Jews and how the announcement of this baby's birth sets the proverbial cat among the pigeons.

A vulnerable infant makes a powerful king look weak in his insecurity and paranoia – now there's an illustration of contrast.

Kate Huey, http://www.ucc.org/weekly_seeds

Or in other words: The Empire Strikes Back

This is indeed what we see in this reading: the empire striking back and the empire being thwarted in its frenzied attempts to halt the true power for life. Power at the centre, and its continual battle to hold the centre, cannot match the power that is at the margins where there is plenty of room to take root and grow.

A note here at beginning of Matthew's gospel, and of our year travelling in faith with Matthew: it's at the margins where we, as disciples, need to be. This is where we will be most at home. This is where we belong, connected and rooted in God's life-giving power.

Now I have something of a "clear the decks" comment in relation to this text. A question that may be asked relates to the horrific nature of this reading. It is like news items out of Aleppo, or this week Nigeria that are preceded by: Warning details in this may disturb some people. Disturb, of course they disturb, but more disturbing that we might turn away. Disturbing that the version of the Christmas narrative popularly known doesn't include this episode; and that the world at large doesn't realise that at the heart of the reason for the season is the horror of brutal and violent power.

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

Matthew 2:16

So this is the question: how come God let all these babies die? What seems worse is that in Matthew's typical way he writes:

Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

Matthew 2:17-18

And earlier, regarding the flight to Egypt,

So was fulfilled what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

Matthew 2:15

Does God kill babies to make the Scriptures come true?

No. Definitely, no.

Such would be a mis-reading, a mis-hearing of the text. For Matthew's wording is very careful. As Kate Huey notes, not "All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the prophet", but "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet." Just as the prophet knew there would be, there is pain and suffering, especially when trying to be in tune with the spirit of God. And the message? Not that it is God's will that makes it happen, but that God is there even in the midst of these worst possible things.

Why do bad things happen? They happen: that's reality. What's God got to do with it? God is there in the pain; God is the spirit of life never letting go. In the words of Paul: "There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.." Nothing, not even the worst possible evil can push God's love out of the picture. Nothing, not even the most horrific acts can stop the power that is God from continuing to strive for rescue and relief.

So the presence of God is not in the rescuing of the favoured ones, in this case the chosen one Jesus, at the expense of all the others. It is the loving presence encompassing all that does not balk at the worst possible, but remains on task to find the way through so life can open up for everyone.

Called out of Egypt to do God's will: one more piece of the story to consider. There was safety in Egypt (paradoxically given it was the place of tyranny and violence in the original exodus story – sure sign there are no absolutes of good and evil in the world we live in). Safety when needed, but life is not about staying put – as long as there are needs to respond to. Giving refuge – and receiving it – when it is needed is pertinent for our context. Important also is the reality of sojourning. In some sense we are always sojourners. Travelling with God, travelling in faith, is always like that. Sojourn for a time, but never permanently fixed in place; never settling down like sediment.

This is the problem for power of the controlling kind – Herod and countless others since. It has to make itself firm, fixed in its abode. Which means it has to worry about contenders to its place. And worry about those who will speak truth to power, challenging the damage it is doing and the injustice it is perpetuating.

It is sojourners who are able to speak and challenge like this, being more on the margins and therefore being more aware of what life is like for those at risk of being left out of life's benefits.

Matthew knows that refugee stories often tell us of desperate midnight escapes. Matthew knows that sometimes even parents and children get separated in the dark and never again find each other. Because Matthew listens [to the layers of history – Rachel, slavery in Egypt, Jeremiah, destruction of the temple, etc. etc.], he tells a story of messiah that does not pretend that the world is pretty and calm. Matthew's messiah story spins the wailing of every generation together and weaves it into a shocking story of how God is present in the Creation. God is with us in the bodies of refugees. God is with us in the corpses lying in the street. God is with us in the desperate midnight escape. And in each case, God is with us, not because everything turns out alright in the end. God is with us precisely because it does not turn out alright. Rachel's wailing is a sign of the presence of God, not of the absence. Rachel's voice is God's voice.

Richard Swanson, provokingthegospel.wordpress.com

Carol The Coventry Carol

Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
By, by, lully, lullay.
Lullay, thou little tiny Child,
By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do,
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling for whom we do sing
By, by, lully, lullay.

Herod, the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All children young to slay.

Then, woe is me, poor Child for Thee!
And ever mourn and sigh
For thy parting neither say nor sing,
By, by, lully, lullay.

Conversations around the Table

Continuing the Conversation

1. Why do you think the church tells this tragic story right in the midst of Christmas joy?
2. What have been the "Egypts," the places of refuge and safety, in your life?
3. When have you had to change plans, to re-route your itinerary, to make a new life in a new place?
4. How do you respond to Freire's challenge that we cannot be neutral in the conflict between the powerful and the powerless?
5. In what ways is God calling you to courage in this new year?

Prayers

FLEE! (Matthew 2:13-23)

They fled to Egypt
away from persecution
in the dead of night.

There they lived safely
until oppression ended
in their home country.

Seeking asylum

others flee, only to find
off-shore detention.

Human rights abused,
no safe home to return to,
how do they endure?

How long, O Lord, how long?

Jeff Shrowder, 2017

Ecumenical Prayer Cycle: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine

Fathering, Mothering God,
We pray for all children who have never known
or who have lost the loving care and protection of their parents...
For all children whose days begin and end in fear and uncertainty...
For all children who have no one to care
for their comfort and wellbeing...
For all children unsheltered and uncomforted...
For all children alone and afraid....

And we pray too for all those who have lost someone they love
through actions driven by the fear and violence of others.
Fathering, Mothering God – keep them all in your sight,
hear their cries and right their wrongs, now and in eternity.

<http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>

...prayer book prayers...

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but you.
Great and wonderful are your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank you for the many splended variety of your creation.
Thank you for the many ways we affirm your presence and purpose,
Thank you for the freedom to do so.
Forgive our violation of your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.
We stand in awe and gratitude at your persistent love
for each and all of your children:
Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.
Grant to all our leaders attributes of the strong;
mutual respect in word and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power,
and the will for peace with justice,
for all.

Eternal God, creator of the universe, there is no God but you. Amen.

www.oikoumene.org Prayer by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim clergy, Excerpted from Current Dialogue 24/93

Sent to Carry Healing and Hope

Serving in the Week Ahead

In the community ... being Christ shaped

Offering Hymn *Kauri, flax, and rata trees* tune: Oxford

Dedication and Blessing

As we offer our gifts to you, Holy One, may they join all creation in blessing and serving your people.
Called to be your people, may we notice those who are forgotten and offer our lives and hearts to them.

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May the eye of God be dwelling with you,
The foot of Christ in guidance with you,
The shower of the Spirit pouring on you,
Richly and generously.

Kia tau/the grace...

...[singing] *A-men, a-men, a---men*

Robyn McPhail, 01.01.2017

NOTICES FOR TODAY – 1 JANUARY 2017

Parish email: admin@kkup.org.nz

Church Office at Cornerstone: 09 407 8250

Minister: Robyn McPhail (DD) 09 283 4802, 021 0247 6280

minister@kkup.org.nz

Find us at www.kkup.org.nz and on [Facebook](#)

Notices: Jenny Phillips 09 407 8883 jenny.jane@xtra.co.nz

KK Pastoral: Jessica Scott 09 407 5555 jomscott2@gmail.com

ROSTERED FOR NEXT SUNDAY 8 JANUARY 2017

Organists: Marie Cannon - KK Clyde Foster - Kaeo

Readers: Ros Simpson KK tba Kaeo

Door and Tea: Gage and John Latell

Communion Prep: Ros Simpson and Helen Norman

LECTIONARY READINGS FOR THE COMING WEEK:

Isaiah 42: 1 - 9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34 -43, Matthew 3:13 -17

CORNERSTONE Kerikeri will be closed for the next two days, with a presence again on Wednesday 5 January from at least mid morning to mid afternoon. Call by to visit, and to chat with visitors, if you wish.

SEWING/UPHOLSTERY/UP-CYCLING FURNITURE VOLUNTEERS: for work at Northland Regional Correctional Facility, Ngawha. Are you creative and have sewing experience, upholstery skills or up-cycling of used furniture and be willing to support young men at our Youth Unit NRCF in valuable work skills or opportunities to generate money on their release from prison? Can you offer 2-3 hours weekly on a Monday/Wednesday or Thursday afternoon to assist the Sewing Tutor, Joanne, in our Sewing Industry? Full vetting required including MOJ and reference check, own transported needed, full prison Induction/training and ongoing support and supervision provided. Contact Ruth Patterson, Regional Volunteer Coordinator, ruth.patterson@corrections.gov or phone 09 306 8383 Mobile: 027 8866881 to discuss further.

KERIKERI RETIREMENT VILLAGE CHAPEL SERVICES: Every Sunday at 4.00pm at the Ted Robinson Chapel. Our parish leads the service on 22 January