

Sunday Sermon January 1, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 2: 13-15; 19-23

Sermon Theme: Faithfully follow where the Lord leads

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Most of us have been on at least one hike in our life. Some of us have kept it simple. We have stayed on trails that are wide, well-marked and easy to follow. But there are others of us who have ventured onto Mt. Charleston or into Red Rock who go on the trails that aren’t so wide, well-marked or easy to follow.

If we find ourselves on one of these trails, we might hope that we have someone or something to follow: a guide, a map, or even a sign. If we don’t have anything to follow, we might find ourselves in danger, wandering around lost.

The importance of following that guide, map or sign is made clear in many ways. The guide explains that there are places that you will have to step where they step, grab where they grab, the map makes it clear to look out danger in certain areas, to not go off the trail in others, and the signs point the way to safety. In all of these cases if we follow the directions that are before us, if we follow what these say, we understand that we will end up safe and sound at the end of the trail.

This morning we see the importance of faithfully following a guide. Not an earthly guide who might make a mistake, but a heavenly guide who never makes a mistake. Although, our Guide, our God, does not give us a roadmap for where our life will go and what will happen to us during that life, we faithfully follow where he leads us, knowing that he will lead us safely to our destination.

Most of us think that we have a confusing life. Between jobs, bills, navigating retirement accounts, doctor’s visits and children, even grown children and grandchildren, this life can be both frustrating and confusing. But imagine for a moment the life that Mary and Joseph had led in the first few years of their marriage.

Mary went from being a young woman planning to be married to an unwed, pregnant mother to be, even on the verge of being a single parent to a married mother of a baby boy. Joseph went from thinking he would be starting a family with Mary to an instant family with a child that was not his.

They couldn’t even settle down in Joseph’s hometown. They picked up their life and moved from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south. While they were there Mary had the baby. Now, it would seem that life could settle down. Soon after the birth, they had visitors. A group of shepherds came praising God for the Savior in the manger.

When Jesus was presented at the temple in keeping with the Law, not one, but two people came out of the crowd and recognized him. Not only did they recognize him, they praised him. Simeon grabbed the baby up in his arms and praised the Lord and the baby for being the Savior. The old prophetess Anna, prophesied about Jesus saving his people.

Some time later, a group of men from a foreign country come praising God and bringing Jesus expensive gifts. They speak of a star that they had seen, a star that had guided them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, a star that made it clear that this is the Messiah and Savior.

Sounds like a movie plot instead of the way Joseph's little family had started out. After all this had happened, after all these things had occurred, God sends an angel to give Joseph and his family further direction to keep them safe. ¹³ **When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."**

King Herod had not been happy when these foreign dignitaries had shown up at his palace asking him where the new king was born. Foreign governments sent emissaries and gifts all the time to make and keep the peace between their nations. Governments might also plot against each other by trying to overthrow a king. This group of men angered Herod so fiercely, that when they did not return he made an edict that all male children in and around Bethlehem should be found and killed.

Even though Herod did his best to try to end this threat to his throne, his earthly actions and plans were not strong enough to overcome God's plan for the salvation of the world. God warns Joseph in a dream to go.

We see Joseph's reaction which flowed from his faith. ¹⁴ **So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."**

We don't often look at Joseph because there is not much written about him in the Bible. But what we do see shows us a man who is full of faith who listens to the Lord and does what is asked of him.

We see Joseph faithfully following God's direction many times. Although, he had intended to divorce Mary, when the Lord directed him, he took Mary home to be his wife. Because it was the God's written command to him and his family, he brought Jesus to the temple according to the Law, even though others would have overlooked it for more important things. And now, after all these other things have happened, he immediately follows the message of the Lord to leave for Egypt. He got up right away, just as the angel had told him to do, and packs up his family in the dark of night and they leave for Egypt.

There are many times that we will do something when someone else asks us to because we know the reason we are asked. If our spouse is making dinner and they ask us to run to the store for an ingredient, we do it because we know it is for supper. If the boss asks us for the report because the big meeting is coming up, we do it because we know it is information for the meeting. If someone tells us to get our bags packed for vacation, we do it because we want to have the right things on our trip.

But what is our first reaction when we are asked to do something and we don't know the reason for it? When the spouse says, "Why don't you change. We're going to do somewhere." When the boss drops a mountain of paperwork, or a new project on our desk and tells us it needs to be done in two days. When the children are told to get their shoes on. What is the reaction when we don't know why we are being asked to do something. Why? Give me a good reason and I will do it, but only with a good reason.

What is our answer to God when he is our leader and in his wisdom he leads us in a new or different direction that is different from the one we planned? Do we stop and resist, or do we faithfully follow knowing that God is in control?

I think for most of us, me included, we hesitate to have a faith that follows the Lord no matter what. We are willing to do what God says, but only if it is comfortable and goes along with our own plan for life. We have seen the reaction of fear when a new president takes office. But it is really not about a new president, our problem, our question is with God. Are we willing to trust in God and faithfully follow where God leads us? We have seen death and loss in families. Do we trust in God? Are we willing to faithfully follow believing what we confess, that heaven is a victory and a blessing? We have seen people be afraid of what the new year might bring. Are we willing to faithfully follow our Lord into the New Year trusting that God is with us in the new, as he has always been in the past? Are we able to faithfully follow believing that God will continue to bless us and keep us?

In His Word, God makes it clear that he is in control of everything. He wants us to put our faith into action by faithfully follow in the way that he leads. No matter the state of our finances or bank account, the state of our lives, family, or health, the state of our nation or our world, God tells us he is the guide leading us through this life and to walk in the way that he is leading.

Joseph left everything behind. He literally dropped everything to faithfully follow the Lord's direction. In the dark of night, he left with his little family. How many of us would have followed like that? Would we have followed as he did, or would our sinfulness get in the way of our faithful following?

Herod's death signaled the end of the vendetta against the false king. ¹⁹ **After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."** ²¹ **So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."**

Once again, Joseph faithfully follows the direction of the Lord and takes his family back to Israel. He follows the very practical direction of the Lord to go back to Nazareth out of the direct control of Herod's son Archelaus.

Joseph is a study in humbly and faithfully following where the Lord leads. Our God and guide in this life is much better than any map or person. There is no question that our lives will get frustrating and stressful or that there are problems, challenges and hurdles in life because of sin. But our God is always faithful to his promises. He has forgiven us for our times of doubt and questioning and he continues to be faithful in leading us to what we really need, even when we are not faithful in following him.

We do not need to know why when God is leading because we already know that he is leading away from trouble and temptation. We also know where we are going. We know that the destination God is leading us to is much better than the road we are traveling on. In this New Year, pray that we faithfully follow the Lord in everything because he will lead us safely through this life to our heavenly home. Amen.