

Association for Theological Field Education  
Saturday Morning Worship – January 24, 2015  
Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño, Preacher  
Matthew 2:13-23

When I was elected a bishop, a good friend of mine said to me, “You do know what’s going to happen now, don’t you?” I was already in a bit of a daze so his comment really befuddled me. “Well,” he said, “today is the last day anyone will ever tell you the truth.” He went on to explain that from that moment on because I had become a bishop of the church, people would only tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, but never the truth. I’m here to tell you that is NOT true, at least not anymore! The landscape of the episcopacy has changed!

The change hit me full force when in the first weeks of active service as a bishop and in response to the context of the ministry of my assigned area I spoke of caring for the immigrant and stated that baby Jesus had been an immigrant himself. Oh my! The response was fast and furious!

Jesus was not an immigrant, not a refugee, not poor, not political, and certainly did not stand with those dirty, shiftless and worthless immigrants invading our country! It wasn’t just one person taking me on and telling me their truth, it was an organized response.

The fax machine in my office began to spew out these messages one right after the other. My administrative assistant from her desk shouted out, “Help! What do I do?” as she began to drown in the faxes coming through. We decided to turn off our fax machine thinking that would shut it down. But then, we started to get calls from all over our center! The fax machines in every one of the offices in our center had begun to spew out the same kind of message. We turned off all the fax machines. And then, they started coming by email; a deep stack in many ways! I wish I had worn my Texas boots on that day!

So don’t let anyone tell you that bishops never get any push-back. We get told a multiplicity of truths and we have to sort through them. It’s good for us to get the push-back; good for our ongoing spiritual formation, our teaching and hopefully our preaching. So good that I can stand before you today and tell you with great confidence that I have sorted through this multiplicity of truths and find that baby Jesus, with his mother Mary and earthly father Joseph, was an immigrant, perhaps a political refugee, but certainly an immigrant whose suffering began early in his life.

I have had a few days of push-back, but Jesus.....Jesus suffered a life-time of push-back all the way to the cruel and crushing experience of being pushed back onto a cross, crucified and left to die. Jesus takes upon himself the deadly clash between the world as it is and the world as it should be according to God our Creator.

The child Jesus, in the arms of his mother and under the care of his father became an immigrant because the world as it is, is cruel and powered by selfishness and greed. Jesus started his life facing the selfishness and greed of King Herod and ended his life on this earth under the power of the selfishness and greed of not just one King but that of an entire Roman Empire!

Attentiveness to the world around us today will show us that the landscape of human existence has not changed enough from the time of King Herod, and the birth of the Christ Child; a true and fair judgment of our work as disciples of Jesus. Where is our longing and commitment to the equity, the justice, the love, and the peace of the world Christ Jesus ushered in, in his birth? I'll tell you brothers and sisters, we would do well to listen to the warning that through a sacred dream came to the Magi telling them not to go back to Herod, but rather to find another way. It is the same sacred word that later came to Joseph through an angel in a dream...find another way.

If I have learned one thing in the ministry with immigrants, it is that we will never find our way in addressing our broken immigration policies until we stop going back to the King Herods of this day and age expecting that they will show us the way. We can't just keep going back to the kings of big business whose pockets are lined by the wealth obtained from the economic enslavement of our brothers and sisters who are then forced to migrate. We can't keep going back to the kings and queens in our communities who benefit from the vulnerability of the undocumented immigrant in this country. And we can't keep going back to our political queens and kings who run their election campaigns and their political offices on who can show more hatred for the immigrant and thus be worthy of election and longevity in political office! They are not the way; they can't even point out the way, and they will only continue to bring betrayal and the death of the spirit of justice.

The Magi found another way to not betray Jesus. God protected our Lord for our sake though Herod's fear and paranoid insecurity led him to slaughter a generation of children and brought the weeping and great mourning of all the mother Rachel's of the land.

We must find another way. You and I believe that the way is Christ, our hope, the light of the world, God with us. With the courage of the prophets of old we must call the world to find its way back to God for the sake of the children of this generation and generations yet to come.

This past summer as the unaccompanied children from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador came to the U.S. I joined other religious leaders and many of you in responding to their arrival. I learned so much about human suffering, the capacity of human sinfulness to inflict pain and death, and I learned about human hope.

With the hope of Moses' mother the parents of these unaccompanied children sent them all alone down the river and through the desert and out into the wilderness of life so that they might have a chance to live, live a full and fruitful life. One little 11 year-old boy came all alone from Honduras, walking, on a bus, and even riding the train through Mexico that many immigrants ride to get here but whose ride is so dehumanizing, so traumatic and even so deadly that it's called the Beast. Somehow that little boy got all the way to the U.S./Mexico border and then got himself across the Rio Grande River.

As he came out of the river he landed on a private property, the home of a family he did not know and who did not know him. But from that moment forth that little boy and that family became eternally connected because on that property he fell over and died. He died of exposure, hunger and dehydration. I've wondered if he also died of a broken heart as he faced the same cruel world that the Christ Child, the immigrant Jesus, faced.

I'm told that no one knew what to do with him. Even the Border Patrol agents found themselves paralyzed at the sight of this little boy dead before them; the same agents sent there to make sure

he didn't cross the border. The tears of those Border Patrol agents as they knelt around this child brought more humanity than our southern border had known in a long time.

Someone called the funeral home and they came for the little boy's body. Still no one knew who he was or what to do with him. But then even from death that little boy answered their questions. As the mortician removed his dusty and worn clothes and came to his belt, there taped on to the back side of the tiny buckle of his belt was a message sharing who he was and where he was going.

I am haunted but also emboldened by this little boy. Every day now I am asking myself, "Who am I and where am I going." I would raise the same questions for you as I offer up the good news that we are the people of God, God who so loves the world, all of us, that he came among us as a child, even an immigrant, so that we might know the depth of his love and the hope of his heart for us. Where are we going? I pray we are walking and working with Jesus toward the beautiful life-giving landscape of the very reign of God. May it be so.