

Matthew 1:18-2:23: Infancy & Childhood

Introduction:

Friends!

Today's message is straightforward. We're talking about Christmas! We're barely in our first steps of walking through Matthew's Gospel. Last week we introduced this book; it was one of the most riveting, interesting messages I've ever preached, so if you missed it, it's online. Seriously, though, it wasn't that riveting; but it did lay out some important things we'll see in Matthew as we move forward.

This morning I want to address a couple of things that happen when we read Christmas stories. I'll review what was read to us and bring to the fore some things that we read past, and I hope that we can end with some considerations of how this passage can inspire us to more than Christmas decorations, but to live like Jesus.

What I mean is this: We talk all the time about the meaning of Jesus' death on our behalf, how we've been reconciled to God through his self-sacrifice; we talk less, but still some, thankfully, about the implications of Jesus' resurrection for us. We mine Jesus' ministry for all sorts of life wisdom, encouragement, and our standards. But we don't lean into Jesus' birth for much. We treat it basically as prologue.

What I hope for today is that we can find meaning in these passages about Jesus' first days, long before he was on mission declaring the Kingdom of Heaven had come. I hope we can discover something that matters for us more than just once a year, when we celebrate the Messiah's birth, but something that can matter all the time for we who have cast your lots with Christ.

What I won't talk about today, because there's only so much time in the world, is Matthew's understanding of prophecy, and how Jesus' life, and the events surrounding him, fulfill it. We'll come back around to that, I promise.

Let's pray.

Prayer:

Help, Christ.

Correcting Things:

A problem we have when we hear today's passage is simply that most of us know the Christmas story so well that we don't really hear, we've become almost unable to hear the story as Matthew tells it.

There are reasons for this. First of all, there's simply the thing we'll deal with throughout our walk in Matthew, which is that in our heads we've smashed together these four gospels, and their insightful, unique, helpful perspectives on Jesus, into one story. That isn't wrong, it's not bad, but it does mean that we minimize the very unique things that each of these

gospel writers wanted to highlight for us. We smooth over the differences, and it helps us to memorize the great big true story plot lines, but we lose those details that so often matter when it comes to deep connections with Jesus' life.

We also don't hear the Christmas Story anymore, especially not Matthew's, because our traditions collapse all its detail into static images. What I mean is this: If all you ever see growing up is a manger, with three wise men, then you just come to believe that Jesus was born in a barn, that there were wise men there, and that there were three of them, right? But none of that is biblical. We sing "we three kings," but there's no mention of how many of these "magi" there were, there's only a mention of three gifts they bring. There could have been two or a dozen of them; some plurality of "magi." They weren't kings, and they weren't "wise men," per se; they were something closest to, oh, astrologers, sooth-sayers, people whose heads were in the clouds, reading the stars, and pursuing mystery and seeking to divine the future for whatever society they came from. If our children grew up doing what they did, we'd be really, really upset about their fascination with pseudo-scientific pagan stuff, we'd worry about why they are so into horoscopes.

The church has even over time given names to these guys--Balthazar, Casper, Melchior--which is an extra-crazy thing to do, to go from not knowing how many there even were, to naming them. And this seems

natural to me; details we don't know we want to fill in. But I want us to be people who reclaim the real details of the Christmas story, rather than relying on made-up ones for depth and interest and, oh, narrative texture, if that's a phrase I can use without you beating me up.

And our nativity set has the three kneeling down, you know, their one camel flopping over nearby, and little baby Jesus is there. But from everything we know in Scripture, these "magi," these pagan astrologer-priests, they came when Jesus was a toddler, not a newborn. He was less than three, maybe two, give or take, but not by much. He wasn't a baby anymore. This is why the capital-C Church has celebrated the holiday called "epiphany," which remembers the magi's arrival at Jesus' house, on a day other than Christmas day. It's because they were different days, most likely separated by a couple of years.

But our traditions, and our desires for a smooth story, and just the way we remember things, all contribute to this thing where we hear the Christmas story, and we replace what really happened with our shorthand version of it. It's hard to discover meaning in something so abbreviated.

In eight months, when we come around to Christmas again I wonder what story we'll lean into? Will it be the real one, or our shorthand? All of us get upset if someone glosses over a part of our own story that we find important, and neglects those details that have mattered so much to us. Let's try to treat Jesus' story

with the same respect we want of our own.

Matthew's Perspectives At Play: Fulfilled Prophecy:

Over and over in the Christmas story we read about things “being fulfilled.” As Matthew tells his story he interrupts the narrative to point out that this or that thing that he just mentioned fulfilled this or that Old Testament passage. He quotes Isaiah, Micah, Hoseah, Jeremiah--these Old Testament prophets.

It's important to notice what Matthew is doing when he quotes Scripture and suggests Jesus is “fulfilling” something said by the prophets. What he's doing is simply connecting expectations about the Messiah to Jesus. Right? This is what he's doing. He's connecting biblical expectations about what would be true of the Messiah to the experience and life of Jesus. These are proofs for us: Who is Jesus? He's the one Israel's been waiting for, and you can tell, because all these things we expected, and even things we didn't expect, they're seen in his life.

We'll come back to this. But I want to point out that what Matthew isn't doing is approving of what he says is happening around Jesus' life.

An example: Matthew quotes Jeremiah, saying “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” He says that Herod's slaughter of children in Bethlehem “fulfills”

this saying of Jeremiah. But if we open Jeremiah 31, we wouldn't naturally read this passage as a prophecy of the Messiah at all. There, it's a description of Israel's exile, and how the people themselves are no longer going to be in the land God gave them, and immediately following it, God says this: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded....They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your descendants....Your children will return to their own land." God's saying that the exile will be ended, and Israel will be brought back to the land God's given them.

It's hard for us, in our understanding of what "prophecy" is to connect this at all to what's going on with Jesus: the context, the situation, the promise that the weeping can be stopped, because what's causing it will be undone, none of that applies. But as Matthew writes about Jesus' life, he is reminded of this first time when Israel wept, and maybe insensitively to our contemporary ears, does want, I think, for us to see that in Jesus' there will be something like a return from exile, something to take joy from someday even for these grieving families in Bethlehem. What he's not doing here is saying it was God's plan all along that Herod should slaughter the children.

There are other ways Matthew uses the prophets and meaning he has when he talks about things "being fulfilled," even in today's passage. We'll talk about those on other Sundays. Sometimes he is straight up

saying, “the prophet says the Messiah would do this or that, check it out, Jesus is.” But that’s not what he’s doing with this passage about inconsolable grief, and he’s not affirming an evil as good, either.

But what did we see in today’s passage, really?

Rolling Through: Marriage

As Matthew tells the story, Mary’s “pregnant though the Holy Spirit.” There’s no mention of angels, no mention of Mary’s submission to God’s will for her and her great song. Matthew tells us instead about Joseph.

This makes sense, given Matthew’s orientation toward Jesus’ Jewishness. Ancient Israel was patriarchal; women were not equal to men in Israel. Matthew is simply not out to guide people into the very biblical truth of equality among all people.

Jesus was born into a cultural context, which doesn’t mean that the culture he was born into was some ideal we ought to strive for; it means, simply, that there were things true about his world that are not (and I would argue should not be) true about ours.

Anyway, to marry Mary, when she was pregnant with someone else’s child, as she seemed to be, wouldn’t fly in Joseph’s Israelite world, but he loved her, right? He didn’t want to “expose Mary to public disgrace,” so he was going to quietly break off the marriage. We have a hard time understanding how you can divorce someone you’re not married to, but betrothal,

engagement, was as significant an obligation as marriage, and Joseph was beyond well-within his rights to end the engagement.

Joseph is going to divorce her, but while he's dreaming an "angel of the Lord" appears to him, a messenger from God. The angel says "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[f] because he will save his people from their sins."

I love this. "Son of David" isn't Joseph's last name; it's a title of honor, something Jesus is called when people recognize his authority as Messiah. The angel begins by reminding Joseph of his lineage, and calling him something that he would never be called by anyone on the street, because he's no Messiah, he's nothing special. He's just a guy, you know? This doubles-down on the surreality of the vision he's having. And he's told to "not be afraid to take Mary as his wife," and I wonder about all the things Joseph must be fearing, having considered whether or not he should divorce this woman he meant to marry, and how it must have been when Mary told him: his fears of being thought a cuckold by his family, friends, neighbors; his worries about Mary's betrayal; his fears about what sort of person he must be to have been taken in this way, to still love Mary and not want to disgrace her. He was a person like we are all people. And he's told that the son she'll bear is conceived not by another guy in their

village, but by the Holy Spirit, and that he'll need to be named Joshua, as the Hebrew puts it, or as it is in greek and in our Bibles, Jesus. This name isn't uncommon; no one would give it a second glance; Jesus would have grown up knowing other Jesus's, and their names all meant something like "yelling to God to save you," "God help me!" "God save me!" And Joseph is told that the boy, yeshua, is going to be different than the other yeshuas around; he's going to save people from their sins. He's going to be the help that his own name shouts for.

And when he wakes up, he gives up his fears. He and Mary move forward in their marriage. They don't sleep together until Jesus is born; a shocking arrangement, and one more unmet expectation Joseph must have, but something that they do, Joseph does, to honor the news he's been given.

Rolling Through: Magi

And Jesus is born. Matthew doesn't tell us the story of his birth the way Luke does; it's enough that he's born to set things in motion.

Herod, who gets called "Herod the Great," wasn't great at all. He was a puppet king, who had worked with the Romans to overthrow Israel's ruler and establish his own royal line, slaughtering all those who might have asserted rights over the throne as soon as he can. Because it was politically wise, he abandoned a wife and child to marry into the Roman emperor's family tree. His life is a violent one. But Herod is ruling

as king over Israel. The pagan astrologer-priests arrive in Jerusalem and ask around to find out where the new prince is, the “king of the Jews who has been born,” because they want to worship him. We can read this in two ways: as worship the way we think of worship, the thing we do to God alone, giving voice to God’s worth and power and otherness. Or we can read it as, oh, pay royal tribute to the new king, honor him, present him with gifts that befit his stature. This is where I land. Matthew may be hinting at the way Gentiles are going to be flocking to worship Jesus as God in time, and this foreshadows that certainly, but that’s not Matthew’s style, really; that’s Luke’s. Worship as a word means simply to “bow down to,” and they were coming to bow down to this king, really and figuratively.

But a king who was messing up creation from the get-go, right? I hope we see how weird this is! It’s so weird. Creation itself testified to Jesus’ birth, changed in a way that pagan astrologers noticed, and followed up on. They spent their time reading the stars and saw a new star that meant something huge had happened, and it happened here. There’s something about the pagan priest’s view of the world, which believes that the stars matter and reveal things, that was at least in Jesus’ case true. True enough that they ended up in Jerusalem, bugging around for the new King of the Jews.

And of course they end up at Herod’s palace, because the new King of the Jews should be Herod’s son; a

prince who will inherit his rule.

But Herod doesn't have a toddler bobbing around. Maybe for awhile he wonders if a concubine got pregnant and he didn't realize it.

And automatically we realize that Jesus' birth is political. It's utterly politically. We think of it as pastoral, in, oh, art terms: rural and peaceful and full of pastures and sheep and little creeks, or our imagined mediterranean equivalents of these things. Palm trees and vineyards. But Jesus was born into a violent world, where those with political power and means were killing others so that their power might be established and certain.

Herod has ears in the city. Historically, there's some evidence of a secret police force, and a huge number of personal soldiers. He hears about the astrologer-priests, asking about the son he doesn't know of, this embodied threat. He had to fight for his throne and he's not going to lose it now. The pagans are disrupting business, causing a scene, the word is spreading, and "all Jerusalem," at least those who are invested in Herod's reign, the political and religious elites, are disturbed.

Herod calls an emergency cabinet meeting; well, gathers "the people's chief priests and teachers of the law," and asks them where the Messiah was expected to be born. He knows, you know? Something about the weirdness of this, creation attesting to a new thing,

strange pagans coming in procession from far away, this is more than something to ignore. It reeks of God, of intervention in things that are more miraculous than reasonable.

There's consensus that the Messiah ought to be born in Bethlehem. So Herod secretly--and it strikes me that this must have been a terrible secret, because, I mean, these are fancy strangers asking crazy things, this is news, and people would have been watching, but he secretly calls the pagan astrologers to him. He asks when they first saw the star, and does some mental math. We infer from the story that it must have been less than three years since it appeared in the sky; how much we don't know. Herod sends them on to Bethlehem. "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

These astrologers aren't dummies. The current King has no young child, and he's meeting with them in as secret a way as he can, asking probing questions and sending them off with a request to return so that he can worship the new King. The whole "kings giving away their ruling power" is a relatively new thing in the history of the world, and absent in Judea and Galilee. The astrologers must have smelled a rat, here.

They go to Bethlehem. They watch the skies, because it's what they do, and whatever the mechanics of it are, the celestial object they've been following leads them to Joseph's house. It's evening, or early in the

morning. Maybe it's the middle of the night, and Jesus woke, and Mary took him outside so his crying wouldn't wake Joseph. Maybe Mary has noticed the weird star that's in the sky, or it's three-year-old news, now, and there's just a new thing up there. But she's outside, with Joseph, and watching as they arrive, this cohort of strangers. She probably is stressed out, expecting to have to provide hospitality for them, but instead...they walk up and bow down to them.

They offer gifts so extravagant they're beyond normal life, "what do I do with this" sort of gifts: gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

And they leave, they have a warning dream--the implication is that God warns them, these pagan astrologer priests, God intervenes for them to not to go back to Herod. Soon after they go, and Matthew implies almost immediately, Joseph himself dreams, and another messenger from God speaks to him in warning. The timeline gets messy, but this could all be happening in 24 hours, you know? Boom, Boom, Boom, the arrival of the astrologers, the gifts, the dreams, the warning.

Joseph's dream likely comes the night following the day the Magi leave. The angel says to Joseph, "Get up, 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."

Rolling Through: Refugees

Joseph gets up. It's still dark. He wakes Mary. They take what they can grab, their new wealth, and then run away before the sun comes up. Maybe they leave a note; maybe they woke someone before they left. If they are living in a family compound, maybe the rest of the family is awake, still, talking about what happened the night before, and shocked that Joseph is telling them that he and Mary and Jesus are headed to Egypt. Maybe these same family members may come to resent him, hate him, for not warning them about what's to come, too, so they could get away with their little ones.

Mary and Joseph flee to a country where they speak Aramaic with a crazy accent - if they speak it at all, where there is no way to be a faithful Israelite, no synagogue, no Temple, and they raise their son far, far away from his people, his cousins. They have the gifts of the astrologers, at least, to start a new life; something, which most refugees don't have. And you wonder if Jesus had an accent for awhile when the family returned to Galilee.

Rolling Through: Slaughter

Not long after they're gone, Herod realizes the astrologers aren't returning, and won't tell him this new boy-king's address. He rages, and carpet-bombs Bethlehem and the area around it. Not really. He is more strategic than that. He knows this princeling is under three, so he simply sends soldiers to kill every child who is two or younger.

I like to picture Herod here as raging, as throwing a tantrum at being tricked, but I think that's only because it's less frightening than picturing him dispassionately and calculatingly ordering the death of little children just in case.

And see the terrible tragedy, the drama, in all of this. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are on their way, on the road, to Egypt, the land of Pharaohs.

Meanwhile, the king of Israel is doing to God's People the same thing Egypt's ancient Pharaoh did to God's People when all their children except Moses were killed.

Jesus family is fleeing to Egypt while their People's worst memories of Egypt are coming true behind them. And just like only Moses was saved, became the King of Egypt's adopted son, and went on to lead God's People out of institutionalized, racial slavery in Egypt, Jesus, who really is God's Son, is going to lead God's People out of enslavement to sin and death itself, the things that lie at the heart of all terror, slavery or otherwise, so that these terrors might be ended once and for all.

And so this little toddler, whose routines have been destroyed as his family travels day and night to Egypt, is going to become something more than Moses ever was. But behind him is slaughter and terror and pain.

Theirs wasn't a world in which people marry, wait to have children until they are stable, and have one or two, maybe three. Theirs was a world in which you have babies, a mess of them, boys, hopefully, and as many as you can because, simply, the mortality rate of children is higher. To have children is to be blessed; for women particularly in their culture, to have young boys is to be seen as successful, as affirmed by God, and achieving whatever honor society can bestow on you.

But Herod comes along, and either in tantrum-filled rage, or worse, calculating, dispassionate slaughter, murders every child, boy or girl, under three.

Jesus never returns to Bethlehem. If he did, of course, there would be no one who was born a year or two after he was. He'd be a reminder to every parent who recognizes him, if they did, or remembers his family, that their own children were taken from them while he was spared. But this doesn't happen.

We forget, you know, when we look at that pretty nativity set, that evil's response to Jesus' birth resulted in the collective trauma of an entire region.

Rolling Through: Return:

Herod Dies.

Historically, we're not sure when. Jesus may have been seven or eight; think of the seven or eight year olds you know, their language, their view of the world, the

ways you see in them the people they'll become. Jesus is growing up, and his place, now, is in Egypt. But Joseph, his adopted father, has another dream "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."

So Joseph again wakes up in the night, this time not fleeing, but gathering up all he has, with Mary and Jesus doing the same, Jesus helping as an oldest son ought, and they begin to head home to Bethlehem, in Judea. If I were Joseph I'd begin to be afraid to go to sleep, because of what sort of major life change this or that dream may ask of me in the night.

Joseph is afraid, though, as he leads his family back home. He seems to hear as he nears Bethlehem that Herod the Great's son has been set up by Rome to rule Judea, and in yet another dream, is warned not to go there, although we don't have particulars as to why this time. There must be some direct risk to Jesus and his family; it may be simply because it's a dangerous place. Herod's son, Archelaus, was so violent that Rome soon replaced him, so it could be simply that Joseph is careful now, after all this trauma, to avoid danger.

The family settles in Galilee, in a town called Nazareth. Some have suggested Galilee was a sort of refuge for those running away from the violence of this brief ruler. Judea is in the southern end of Israel; Jerusalem's there. As you'd move north from

Jerusalem you'd pass through Samaria before arriving in Galilee, where Nazareth lies. It's far away from rulers and threats.

So what can we say about this and how does what we say matter for us? Let me point out some things.

Conclusions & Applications: Childhood Trauma

First, Jesus' childhood was filled with trauma. It was filled with trauma. He moves twice at a tender age, leaving one community behind, then another, and then settling in a place that is almost, but not quite, home. Imagine the disappointment of almost getting to live where your family is, the people you've been told you belong to, belong with, and right at the end, not ending up there. He grows up knowing the world is a fearful, dangerous place and that there are people who are sometimes out to kill you.

I hope that our childhoods weren't filled with fear and instability of place, filled with the absence of family. But Jesus' childhood was, and I wonder if, later in Matthew, when Jesus says "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these," shutting down as he says it his disciples who are trying to block kids out, he does this because he knows how hard it can be to be a little child.

What does this mean for us? Potentially all sorts of things. Maybe it means that we don't sentimentalize Jesus' childhood, don't imagine it all rosy and bright,

and when we see his cute little chubbiness in our nativity scenes we remember that not only are they wrong, but that the Messiah knew what it meant to grow up with trauma. When we read in Isaiah 53 about the suffering servant, “a man of sorrows...acquainted with grief,” and we think of Jesus betrayed by his best friends at the cross; we could instead think of him as a child, torn out of this home, then this home, knowing only that someone is out to get him. His relationship with grief started in his youngest days.

Maybe for those of us who have hurts, hurts that go back to our childhood, we who knew instability and fear long before we ought to have discovered it, we can realize that Jesus can be with us in those hurts, identify with us in them, far more than we might have thought. And as God is with us in those hurts, perhaps we can discover not just God’s presence, but even the good God can make out of our hurts. At least part of that good is that we ourselves can be advocates for children and for childhoods free of the trauma Jesus had to face.

There are all sorts of practical ways we can provide stability and safety in the lives of children, so that they can grow up surrounded by people who care for them. We do some things, and we can do more. But we first must realize that Jesus’ childhood was one filled with trauma, sorrow, and fear.

Conclusions & Applications: Immigrants & Refugees

More than this, though, Jesus grew up as a political refugee. We see that, right? Jesus grew up escaping a political leader, who sought his death because he was a threat, a leader who went on to kill everyone of his peers in the area of the country he was from, simply because they were born.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were refugees, escaping the threat of death. They were immigrants. Jesus grew up an immigrant and refugee.

So. If our Lord and Savior started his life as an immigrant and a refugee, how ought we who follow him treat immigrants and refugees? Is there a connection to be made here?

What I wish is that in the eyes of every single child and parent who is fleeing political persecution or who, out of the fear of death, has left their homeland and gone somewhere else, longing for safety and security, I wish that in their eyes, we would see Jesus.

In their pattern of movement, we would recognize Jesus' pattern of movement.

In Matthew 25 Jesus says this about himself at his return:

“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the

eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Yikes, right! The righteous, of course, are the ones who did all the things to the least of these that these unrighteous neglected. And when Jesus says “I was a stranger and you invited me in,” he’s not talking about just people who are strangers to us; he’s talking about aliens, strangers--foreigners is a better translation--he’s talking as much about immigrants and refugees here as he’s talking about anything else. And I wonder if his experience as a child has shaped this deep mandate he’s given us to care for the least of these.

So. What will you think of the next time you think of immigrants and refugees? Our neighborhood, here around our building and grounds, is full of them, you know? A quarter of Bo’s class were born into languages other than english. I suspect we want to help our neighbors; I know we do, and we do, so

hallelujah: but let's do it because each immigrant and refugee, each stranger to our country, our city, our zip codes, when we think of them we can't help but think of the Messiah who has saved us. Lets see him in them, and so act with advocacy, courage, and selflessness for them, just as our immigrant, refugee Messiah did for us.

Conclusions & Applications: So Much More

There is so much more that we could draw out of this passage. We could talk about the wonder of a God who gives pagan astrologer-priests visions that save their lives. We could talk about becoming so used to power that you no longer have qualms about exercising it in a way that results in death, grief, and terror. We don't do that, of course; but in what ways do we cling to the power we have in the places we have it--and each of us has power in some relationship or some place in the world. We could talk about the responsiveness of Joseph, and his immediate obedience to God, and wonder about our own. How he doesn't protect his reputation or his rights, but is concerned for Mary's well-being even in his hurt. We could talk about how the most common present at the first Christmas was unmet expectations, and Jesus' birth and childhood was full of them, and yet in spite of all the unmet expectations Joseph and Mary and Jesus faced...they didn't stop trusting in God. Herod, of course, slaughtered innocent children and ruined a city when his expectations went unmet.

So we could talk about other things, but I think mostly

this morning I want us to see that Jesus' childhood was full of trauma and trouble, he was an immigrant and a refugee, and whether or not these things shaped his concern for those who had been where he had been, for children and "strangers," as our translations put it, we're charged to be concerned and care for them as if they are Christ himself.

We will care for them. We do care for them. And of course, we are them. But we need to train ourselves, because we live in a society whose posture is largely antagonistic toward refugees and immigrants, and spends far more time complaining about parents than it does helping them protect their children from instability and fear. If we don't train ourselves to remember Jesus' concerns, we'll forget them; there are too many voices of fear, alienation, and disregard in the world. We cannot expect our world to look at a child or look at a refugee or immigrant and see Christ, but we must expect ourselves to.

Children facing trauma, Immigrants, Refugees: These are among the weakest, most powerless people in any society. They are the "least," who we are called to bless. In whatever ways we move forward as a congregation to care for them, I hope we can keep them in mind no matter what we do and where we go. Jesus has given us a mandate to do so. He can identify with their experiences in a way we may not, and that's such a blessing to us if that's the case, because fear, instability, and displacement are curses in our world. I hope we can use the privilege of our blessing for the

good of those immigrants, refugees, and traumatized children, who Jesus can so easily identify with.