

Isaiah 63:7-9  
Palm 148

Hebrews 2:10-18  
Matthew 2:13-23

The holiday season is a season of warm fuzzies. At our home there were a few evenings we turned up the gas stove in our family room and cozied up to watch movies. There are the warm fuzzies of families gathering together, with the excitement of the children and seeing family members that we may see only at Christmas time. Well-most of the time family gatherings are warm fuzzies. Some of us may enjoy making a cup of hot chocolate, wrapping up in a warm blanket, and reading a good book. People at this time of the year are more apt to share their warm fuzzies, sharing warm greetings, if we don't get hung up on people saying Happy Holidays instead of Merry Christmas. We enjoy our times of warm fuzzies.

So why do we have to hear this story of the Massacre or Slaughter of the Innocents. Herod is angered by some news he is hearing. Wise men, in search of the new born king of the Jews, are asking where is the new-born king. Word gets back to Herod, the king of Israel, that some foreign astrologers are asking about the whereabouts of a new the new born king. When you are the reigning monarch, you don't exactly ignore news of a new born king. Herod was a king that was appointed by the Roman Empire for Israel was a vassal state of the oppressive Roman Empire. In order to keep their subjects in check, political tyrants us violence. For example, crucifixions in the Roman Empire were public events. The Romans placed crosses along well-traveled highways, on tops of hills, and at city gates. These were a friendly reminder of what happens if you are not nice to the Empire.

The birth of a new king was a threat to Herod. Herod secretly met with the astrologers and said, "When you find him, kindly inform me where he is, so that I too

may pay him homage. Yeah, if you believe that, see me after worship. I have a bridge I'd like to sell you! Herod wasn't about to pay homage to the new born king of the Jews. No, he was going to find threat, this child and terminate him. But before Herod had a chance, the angels informed Joseph to take Mary and the child and escape to Egypt. And when Herod realized that these astrologers had stood him up, he did what any good political tyrant does, revert to violence. He orders that all children ages two and younger in and around Bethlehem be slaughtered. Innocent children were slaughtered. These innocent children were collateral damage for Herod wanting to eliminate this threat to his reign.

This is not the kind of story we want to hear this time of the year. It is a cold Arctic blast in a season of when we enjoy and want warm fuzzies. Instead of stories of angels announcing to Joseph and Mary that the virgin Mary was pregnant, Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem, not able to find a room in the local Holiday Inn, being born in a manger, angels announcing the birth to shepherds, shepherds and wise men paying homage to the Christ child, we hear a story about the killing of innocent children. Do we have to hear this? Many people may not even realize that this story is a part of the Christmas story because many churches probably don't want to proclaim this story. We do not want to hear this story.

So why do we need to hear about the Massacre of the Innocents? Because it happens every day! This passage is a mirror of life. Herod's deadly intrigue, this sad bit of human history, is replayed almost every day in the newspapers. A political tyrant, quaking in his boots, is on the edge of engaging in a reign of terror to preserve his grip on the population, and an innocent family is caught in the power play and must flee for

their lives. The current crisis in Syria is the same story, a political tyrant engaging in a reign of terror to preserve his grip on the population, and innocent families and children are caught in the power play. It has been estimated that over 400,000 people have died in the Syrian war, with about 86,000 civilians, and tens of thousands of them being children. That is a lot of collateral damage.

Violence is not limited to political tyrants. Sandy Hook Elementary School, Pulse Night Club, a movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado, and the Amish West Nickel Mines School have been incarnations of violence. The city of Chicago has now reached 700 murders, and only about thirty percent are solved! The Massacre of the Innocents.

We need to hear the story because we cannot pretend that life is always cheerful and positive. We cannot live with a “sunshine and success” view of the Christian faith, as Tom Long calls it. The faith is not about thinking positively and turning problems quickly into possibilities. This is often times referred to as prosperity theology.

Prominent leaders in this prosperity theology include Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Reverend Ike, and Joyce Meyer. We cannot emphasize the upbeat and cheerful. It may very well be that God wants us all to be happy. However, as Tom Long wrote, “faith may collapse under the heavy weight of the tragic.” I refer to this prosperity gospel as a thin theology.

Think of it this way. You would not dare walk across a lake when the ice is thin, for your weight may break the ice and you will fall into the frigid water. If the water is colder than forty degrees, you will experience exhaustion and unconsciousness in fifteen to thirty minutes. You want that ice under you to be thick enough, strong enough, to hold your weight. Christ the King Retreat Center is a Roman Catholic retreat center

located on Buffalo Lake in Buffalo, Minnesota. I've been there a couple of times in January. I don't know why a January meeting cannot be in Hawaii rather than Minnesota. Buffalo Lake is over 1,500 acres. It is amazing to me to sit in the dining room of Christ the King Retreat Center that overlooks the lake, and watch the cars driving on the lake. These are not just people driving out to a fishing hole. These include people that are taking a short cut over the lake rather than drive around the lake! No thanks! I realize the lake is frozen, but I'll leave the walking on water to Jesus! We need a faith that will not collapse under the heavy weight of the tragic.

The theology of this story is strong enough, thick enough, that no matter how heavy the tragedy, it will support you. We need a faith that supports us in the midst of peril and distress. Not a thin theology that collapses when tragedy weighs us down. A faith that allows us to trust that God's love in Christ will be with us even in the midst of tragedy. We need a faith to be less afraid of life's dark valleys. We need a faith that will hold us up when tragedy weighs us down.

The theology of this story also reminds us that the despots of the world come and go, the terrorists, the rapists, the murderers, but God's will outlasts and overrules them all. Pharaoh, in the Exodus story, killed the male children for he was threatened by the growing number of Hebrews. Pharaoh, Herod, Hitler, Stalin, are but only some who believe they can secure their power through murder and genocide. We read, "When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared ...." Herod is dead, but the word of the Lord continues.

Glory to God in the highest  
and peace to God's people on earth.