

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Matthew 2: 13 – 18

What times we are living in! Do you feel like just running away and escaping from all what's going on ?

Wouldn't you like to just get away from these shores. How many of you have had your holidays ruined, or your plans changed because of this horrid virus!

Escape COVID 19, escape lockdown!

Have you ever tried to escape from somebody or something before?

Maybe you saw someone coming and you hid yourself in a crowd or turned to look in a shop window. Maybe you saw me and thought "Oh no it's Jonathan, he talks for England I haven't got time for a chat. In my case when Liverpool lose, hiding from the supporters of the team you lost to.

When I think of times I've ran away or tried to hide it never really worked. I remember a headmaster looking for me because I was playing tig outside his office window where I shouldn't have been playing. He caught my friends but I ran away hoping he hadn't noticed but he had and he came into my class and told me off.

Perhaps you are too exhausted to run away both physically and emotionally. The night I finished with Gillingham Football club, I was walking back from the station and up the hill, I could see this great big Alsatian. I was walking on the other side but as I got level this big dog started to growl and ran at me across the road. I was shattered from training, I couldn't run, so I got my bag ready to fend off this huge dangerous dog. The dog nearly leapt at me but suddenly ran back and laid down with its head almost hidden by its paws and legs. The dog started whimpering and I knew that God had protected me from something. It was also a sign to me that I had made the right decision to leave Gillingham Football club.

So are you trying to run away and escape from something?

Maybe you've had time to reflect on your life and on your actions and maybe you recognize that you've been running away from God and the challenges he has for you. You wouldn't be the first and you won't be the last! Remember Jonah running away, it didn't do him a lot of good. I bet Jacob was wanting to run away when he heard that his brother Esau was coming the same brother he cheated

out of his inheritance. Maybe God is wanting you to deal with something maybe even a particular sin but like Adam & Eve, you are hiding.

The great escape is today's title and we looked at baby Jesus being rushed off to Egypt with his mum & dad as his life was in serious danger from King Herod.

King Herod was in power because of the Romans. They put him there and he supported Marc Anthony & Cleopatra who lost to Octavian in a war. Octavian became the Emperor Augustus (Luke mentions him in chapter 2) and he allowed Herod to live and continue as a puppet king. Herod the Great, as he's known by, had many people murdered and killed, including members of his own family.

Antipater his son from his 1st wife Doris was executed in 4BC.

His wife Mariamne I, daughter of Hasmonian Alexandros and Alexandra the Maccabee, executed 29 BC. Herod couldn't have the Hasmonians back on the throne. He executed his 2 sons from this marriage Alexander, executed in 7 BC and his other son Aristobulus IV, executed 7 BCE. Eventually Herod would die a painful death in 4 BC.

Herod was dangerous and was disliked by his own people for mixing with pagans, the romans, for his taxes to fund his grand buildings and parts of his buildings can still be seen today. He had the temple rebuilt that was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. Has anyone been to Israel and touched the western wall? That was part of Herod's work.

There's no doubt with Herod, that had he caught Jesus, Mary & Joseph or even if he had caught the Magi he would have had them all killed. Sadly for the male babies of Bethlehem 2 and under they were all murdered just like in the Exodus story when Pharaoh ordered all the Hebrew boys to be murdered.

In Matthew 2:3 I wonder when it says that 'all of Jerusalem was disturbed' (Due to the news the Magi brought) had more to do with the fear they had for Herod and what would come next rather than being disturbed by the news the magi brought.

Jesus escaped to Egypt as a refugee and we don't know how long for. Luke doesn't even mention this part of the story in his account so my feeling is that Jesus wasn't there for long. Eventually his family returned and settled in Nazareth, fulfilling scripture from Hosea 11:1 ' Out of Egypt I called my son'.

Remember God had previously brought his people out of Egypt from the Exodus story and now he brings out his only son Jesus.

Jesus escaped evil and the Devil's schemes. Throughout his life the Devil was there trying to destroy Jesus or to make his ministry fail. He failed! But the Devil sets his site on us which brings me to one of the 3 things we need to escape from

The 1st is we need to escape the Devil and his schemes

The Devil doesn't seem to be talked about much in the media and when he is brought up he's some kind of cartoon character whispering things in peoples ears.

1 Peter 5:8: Peter writes that the Devil, the enemy is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith and in the knowledge that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering....

He wants to destroy you, he wants to destroy us the Church no wonder we pray in the Lord's prayer 'and deliver us from the evil one'. He wants your ministry to fail, he wants you far away from God as possible. He wants you to hate yourself and see yourself in rags rather than the clothes of a prince or princess. In today's language - he wants to cancel you !!!!

We are in a battle, Ephesians 6: 12 - 13 says put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

The 2nd thing we need to escape from is SIN

If ever there was evidence of sin, this week and this entire lockdown has shown it. People breaking the rules, thinking only about themselves, rioting, anger, abuse, judgemental attitudes towards others, self-righteousness, we have cancel culture - well you who are without sin cast the first stone! Maybe in the end everybody gets cancelled as we are all sinners.

What a mess this world is in!

And we can get sucked into it too.

We get entangled by SIN. We miss the mark! We fall short and we need to turn away from sin and repent.

Hebrews 12: 1 - 2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Is there anything stopping you or hindering you? What entangles you?

Is it some kind of addiction? Is there something you are struggling with? Maybe you are struggling with forgiving someone including yourself? Or struggling with a relationship? Maybe you struggle with yourself, not liking what you see when you look in the mirror. Maybe you have felt rejected and hold back.

Let's throw off everything that hinders and entangles, fix your eyes on Jesus he will calm the waters of your life. He will take your load and you can be forgiven, which leads me to the 3rd and final

GREAT ESCAPE !

Harry Houdini one of the most famous escape artists ever had told his wife, Bess, prior to his death, "If there is any way out. I will find it. Sadly he didn't find it and Bess gave up, she said "Houdini did not come through. My last hope is gone. I do not believe that Houdini can come back to me, or to anyone.... The Houdini Shrine has burned for 10 years. I now, reverently... turn out the light. It is finished. Good night, Harry!"

The mortality of Mankind, the fear and sadness of death. Death comes to us all and Jesus weeps like he did when his friend Lazarus died. The sadness of the disciples on the Emmaus road who had their dreams shattered by the death of their friend and master Jesus. The tragedy is that God didn't design his beautiful creation with death. People were not designed to die but to live. That's why funerals are so hard, that's why it's hard to let go.

If Harry Houdini can't escape death, who could?

Well I have some good news

Jesus said to Martha "I am the resurrection and the life! Whoever believes in me will live even though they die". John 11:25

Were they just words from a Rabbi - NO ! Lazarus come out and he came out
alive

Was that just a one in a million chance - No !

They crucified Jesus, he was dead killed by the efficient Romans who definitely knew how to kill. There was no coming back from the cross if you were a mere man. Jesus experienced what everyone of us will experience one day unless he comes back and unlike Houdini Jesus found a way out!

He went to the grave and conquered death and he came back! Over 500 people saw Jesus alive. People who were in fear of their lives because they followed Jesus were emboldened. Many were martyred. He is alive, he found a way and when you invite Jesus into your life he will put his Spirit into you and you will live! Our tears will turn to joy for we are God's Children and our Father loves us and our Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He walks with us now, he guides us through the valley of the shadow of death and when we pass into glory he will continue to walk with us and he will welcome us home.

Amen