

*Children on the Run*  
Based on Matthew 2:13-23  
December 26, 2010

Aspen Community United Methodist Church  
Meeting at the Aspen Historical Society

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We left Mary and Joseph and Jesus in Bethlehem.  
They were not able to stay there long.  
Warned in a dream our new family flees to another country.

Herod planned to kill every the little boy under two years old.  
Herod was threatened by the presence of this child.

They fled to Egypt and found safe haven for a few years.

The story of the manger gives way  
to the realities of life on this earth for many children – and families.

Kings, presidents, and military juntas  
oppress or destroy communities to maintain their own wealth and power.

What happened to the family of Jesus  
has happened to many families and many children throughout history.



Thirty-six million people in the world - right now  
are displaced because of war and persecution.  
About half are children.<sup>1</sup>

For most of recorded history  
the world and its leaders seem to have it out for children.

Perhaps it is because they are vulnerable.  
They can't fend for themselves very well. They are expendable.

And by seeking the children -  
you can instill even more fear and control over their parents.



I began to ask why - why this big Christian story  
is all about God coming to be with us –  
the divine entering into the world – as a child!

What are we to learn from this?

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The manger and stable give way to a family on the run.

Why?

Jealousy – fear on the part of powerful people like Herod  
that their positions might be jeopardized.

Truth is found in these stories.



We can't really know the historical facts.  
It was written long before people thought much about historical accuracy.

But they knew about human nature -  
and the pursuit of power and wealth over all else.

Religion is a story wrapped around truth.



God comes as a vulnerable child.  
How can that inform my life and my actions?

I think that God is – in a sense of a creative force – the energy of love.

That may be why history  
brings us this enduring story of a baby who needs protecting –  
a little child who needs a safe haven.

Egypt was known to have Jewish settlers.  
From a historical point of view – they probably found a supportive community.

The escape to Egypt is not a cute image.  
It's about a family that is homeless – at risk – and coping.<sup>2</sup>

I cannot let this story go on by without it becoming real in my life.  
But – where are the places it might become real?

Where is the “ah ha” moment?



Two things hit me over the head this week:

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The first was an editorial in the *Dallas News* -  
about a finalist for the newspapers' 2010 "Texan of the Year" awards.

One of the finalists is a woman named **Socorro Brito de Anda** -  
principal of a secondary school in El Paso, Texas  
called the Lydia Patterson Institute.

This school is located within walking distance  
of the bridge between El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico.

The Lydia Patterson Institute – was founded in 1915 –  
by the Methodist Church  
as a safe haven for families fleeing the Mexican Revolution.

The Lydia Patterson Institute is  
still sponsored by The United Methodist Church.

A CNN article from 2009 reported  
that this small United Methodist preparatory school  
is now a safe haven from drug related violence  
on the Texas-Mexico border in Juarez.  
Some of the students walk across the border to attend school.  
This school (according to the *Dallas News*) –  
"helps keep hope alive for families  
for whom beheadings, mass slayings and drug-gang firefights  
have become a nightmarish way of life."

And listen to this:  
Ninety-five percent of its freshmen graduate from high school.  
This is higher than the 80.6 percent graduation rate in Texas public schools.

The mission of the school is to represent the Christian faith  
as understood by The United Methodist Church  
by providing high quality, bi-lingual and cross-cultural  
academic education for leadership and ministry.



The gospel story is not just a sweet story.  
It is a story for all time and all people.  
It is a story that goes to the heart of a deep teaching.

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We are to make the world safe for the children.  
From among all those children - there will be leaders the world needs.

For at least one time in history 2000 years ago -  
God came disguised as one of them.

The Lydia Patterson school is a response to the Christmas story.



I told you that two things manifested themselves before my eyes this week -  
that brought this story into focus in the here and now.

The second was this legislation the U.S. House passed  
but the Senate did not - last week.

I hadn't paid much attention to it - until this fellow in Tennessee  
who claims he's spokesman for the Tea Party  
blogs on the internet  
that he wants the United Methodist Church to go out of business.

That is what he wants to see.

He said he was in Washington D.C.  
and saw on a United Methodist agency building near Capital Hill  
a big banner that said, "Pass the DREAM Act."

With a little study - I learned that this has been a bi-partisan effort  
to give children of illegal or undocumented immigrants  
a pathway to a conditional permanent residency.

The young people who would qualify for this pathway would be those:

- who were brought here as children
- have graduated from a US high school
- and have shown themselves to be of good moral character

A lot of conditions and regulations are involved.

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The federal government would not pay for college for these students.  
But it does say that after a period of time  
and meeting certain requirements – of higher education or military service  
these young people  
could apply for student loans or work-study programs -  
but not things like Pell Grants.

As it stands now – a young person brought into the country as a child  
has to leave and apply for a visa to return.  
This is often very hard.

It is a very complex piece of legislation  
and I don't begin to know really have a grasp of it.

But it was a banner advocating passage of the DREAM Act  
that was affixed to a United Methodist Agency  
that prompted Mr. Phillips  
to call us Socialists, Marxist, unpatriotic and a number of things.

I started to wonder -  
in light of our little family on the run –

Is this a contemporary example -  
of oppressing children within our own borders?

One criticism of the proposed legislation  
was that as a result of its passage  
that these young persons who meet all the qualifications -  
would be able to go to college and/or engage in military service.

And as a result of those things they would be prepared  
to enter the workforce  
and participate in the economy of the United States.

Mr. Phillips did not that.  
He did not want the young people

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whose parents have been legal residents -  
to have to compete along with children of illegal immigrants.

Would that be a way to sideline these young people  
from contributing to our society and economy?

And that reminded me of the fear and the jealousy  
that caused Herod to destroy all the little boys.

And I asked myself -  
if the Nativity story and the flight to Egypt  
says something relevant for us today?

Of course it does.



These two events stand beside the Christmas story:

The Lydia Patterson United Methodist School in El Paso  
and the opportunities it offers to young people  
living in El Paso or Juarez - so close to danger

and

the fellow who wants to see  
the United Methodist Church go out of business  
because of its advocacy – on the part of young people -  
and probably a lot of other things.

Well-meaning citizens often disagree  
about how we promote good in our society.

This fellow does not say that. He simply wants you and me  
and the Aspen Community UMC to go away.



The world is not all that friendly a place for children.  
It was not in first century Palestine -  
and it certainly not today in that same area.

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Life is pretty high risk for children living near the Texas-Mexico border.

I'm glad the Lydia Patterson School exists.

I expect that there are many dedicated United Methodists  
who consider themselves part of the Tea Party movement -  
who would see this fellow as grandstanding for his own ambitions.

It is not so important in the bigger picture.

We can all blog.

It's is just that it caught my attention in its contrast  
to Lydia Patterson Preparatory School  
and how we United Methodists try  
to take these stories seriously.

This school is an example.

And when we write out that check each month to wider mission  
we are responding - to the Christmas story.

It is often hard to write those checks.

There is so much to pay for.

Sometimes it just puts us in the hole farther.

And yet when we are reminded why – we know we don't exist for ourselves.

Pretty soon we will take down the decorations of this season.

I just want to make sure that I don't forget what it was all about  
after Christmas is over.

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<sup>1</sup> UN statistics

<sup>2</sup> Steve Garness Holmes. "Unfolding Light"