



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, JANUARY 4, 2026

JEREMIAH 31: 7-14; PSALM 84; EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 15-19a; MATTHEW 2:13-15, 19-23

MOTHER OF EXILES



onsaid, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."]

Twenty-five years ago, a young artist named Kat Rodriguez made a Statue of Liberty from papier mache. She was serving as an intern for the Coalition of

Immokalee Workers, a labor union supporting migrant farm laborers in southern Florida where they harvested tomatoes. This "lady liberty" was brown-

skinned, a patina declaring her mestizo heritage. Instead of a flaming torch, she raises a tomato in her right hand, echoing the statue in New York harbor with her own beacon of hope and justice for countless refugees who have entered this country seeking a better life. (I have included an image on the sermon manuscript in the narthex and on the website).



For centuries in Latino cultures, statues of Mary have led countless processions, parades and protests as indigenous peoples sought justice and peace in solidarity, informed by “Our Lady” culturally understood. In 2000, this papier-mache statue led the way on such a march, inspiring workers who walked more than 200 miles from Immokalee in southern Florida to Orlando, where the Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association is headquartered. They are the powerful lobby that held wages flat for nearly three decades, forcing laborers to pick 2 tons of tomatoes across a 14-hour day to collect just \$50 in wages.

At the base of this papier-mache statue is the line from Langston Hughes poem: “I, too, am America.” The



statement, and the statue itself, trace the themes from workers’ rights to civil rights to immigrants’ and refugees’ rights, and impels us to consider the trajectory we are on in this nation, in this time. Could such a protest march even happen today?

It is no coincidence that our gospel this morning offers a keen reminder that our spiritual ancestors were refugees, too, caught in the pinch of despotic power that ruled by fear and a savage violence.

Joseph, Mary, and their newborn baby were forced to flee Herod’s maniacal pogrom against Jewish male infants; they were forced to walk more than 300 miles through the Gazan and Sinai deserts to reach the relative safety of a foreign land, Egypt, and remain there several years until Herod’s death prompted their return home. Although not exactly home, to Judea, but further north to Nazareth in

Galilee, to avoid Herod’s son, who if not as cruel as his father, was at least as oppressive in his relentless extraction from the people to feed his gluttonous desire for opulence.

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It all sounds too familiar, doesn't it?

It is not lost on me that at the foot of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, the words from Emma Lazarus' famous poem offer a message of timeless insistence that this country was established on principles that orient to welcome, not reckless xenophobia.

The well-worn words on the statue's pedestal speak of hope and opportunity:

*"Give me your tired, your poor, /
Your huddled masses yearning to
breathe free, /
The wretched refuse of your teeming
shore. /
Send these, the homeless, tempest-
tossed to me, /
I lift my lamp beside the golden
door!"ⁱⁱⁱ*

The poem is entitled "New Colossus," drawing a distinction between imperial impulses to erect colossal statues as historical beacons of fame and glory, and this gentler lady of "liberty enlightening the world." That's the actual name for the statue: Liberty Enlightening the World.

Emma Lazarus was an American Jewish woman who worked tirelessly to welcome and resettle refugees from the antisemitic pogroms of eastern Europe. And they were offloaded from boats alongside others from around the world, a quilted fabric for a nation who hasn't always done things

right, or with liberty and justice for all, but has the seeds of common good sewn into the virtuous dream of unalienable rights for all—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Emma Lazarus saw the statue as a symbol of empathy amidst the bonds of affection for our common humanity.

Keep your storied pomp, you ancient lands, she said. We need no brazen giant of fame, with conquering limbs astride from land to land...

*Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates
shall stand a mighty woman with a
torch,
and her name Mother of Exiles...
From her beacons hand glows
world-wide welcome...^{iv}*

How did we get from there to here? And what are we to do about it?

Well, we have many ways to be engaged in the work of welcome, support, justice and solidarity with those who have been targeted by the powers and principalities. Canon Emily Griffin will share an update this week by email describing ways we are involved this work, and ways you can consider becoming involved as well. I hope you will give prayerful thought to your role in it all.

Let me also say here this morning that our gospel reminds us once more that it takes courage to be people of faith, to follow

God's call in the face of danger and even cost to self. The cost of discipleship is not cheap, and if it were, I doubt the Church would still be here, struggling with questions of how to respond as followers of Jesus in this moment.

The Immokalee Statue of Liberty is a piece of art that offends the powerful precisely because it lends hope to the downtrodden. A few weeks ago, it was removed from the Smithsonian's Museum of American History, and the website scrubbed of any reference to it. Like Herod, the amalgam of offended ego, reactive fear and violent impulse can lead to tragic consequences, but the courageous workers of good will find a way through.

It's worth noting that Joseph never actually speaks in the gospels; his is a courageous

faith in action prompted by messages that come to him in dreams of all things. Dreams. But remember, unless Joseph's dream is really God's dream for Joseph, borne in trust that Joseph might just respond with courage and hope and faithfulness, then what good was there to come from it all?

The pattern is there for us, too.

Are we willing to embrace the possibility that God might have a dream for us in this moment—for you and me—that God might just be interested in using you and me, and the wisdom of our dreams, and the courage to act on them, and by doing so, change the world, too.

Let us dream together, friends, and trust that God will use it, and us, for good.

ⁱ https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_1255703

ⁱⁱ <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2013/02/why-im-walking-200-miles-with-the-immokalee-workers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Colossus

^{iv} Ibid.



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