

Those of you who were here last week and heard Deb deliver my homily on Matthew 3: 13 – 17 may remember that I said that Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels. That continues to be enormously evident in our reading this evening.

You may also remember that I said that Matthew was writing about 45 to 50 years after the resurrection and 10 or so years after the destruction of the Temple and the execution of all the priests and scribes by the Romans. This destruction and slaughter spelled the end of Temple based Judaism and could have spelled the end of Judaism full stop. But the Pharisees rescued Judaism and began a focus on what became Synagogue based Judaism focused very much on the Holy Scripture of the Law and the Prophets. At the time Matthew was writing, those who followed Jesus both Jew and Gentile were a sect within Synagogue Judaism. Matthew was at pains to tell the story of Jesus entirely integrated in Jewish history, and, indeed as a fulfillment of that history. Hence the emphasis in our reading, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.*

Those early followers of Jesus who were Jews thought themselves no less faithful Jews. They wished to persuade all within the Synagogue to follow Jesus. Matthew's Gospel was written to so identify Jesus as the one who was promised from throughout Jewish history who would usher in the Kingdom of God. Let me take a moment to review many of the connections Matthew makes and Jewish history. Some of them I did include last week, but I think it useful to review them.

Matthew equates King Herod to the Pharaoh who ordered the slaughter of first-born Hebrew males in the story of the massacre of the innocents in Herod's effort to eliminate Jesus. Joseph and Mary escape with Jesus to Egypt as did Joseph, he of the coat of many colours. So Jesus leaves his home to escape Herod as Moses left his home in Egypt to escape Pharaoh. Both Jesus and Moses returned to their homes, Moses to Egypt and Jesus to Israel to fulfill their call to save their people. Joseph and Mary bringing Jesus back out of Egypt fulfilled the prophecy in Hosea *Out of Egypt I have called my son*. Moses led his people in the 40-year Exodus. God prevented Moses from entering the promised land because when God told him to speak to the rock at the waters of Meribah, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff in anger and disobedience, and then speaking to the people, took the credit for the water. Several artists have painted pictures of Moses standing on Mount Nebo looking out over the Jordan as the people crossed – a crossing he could not make. Jesus on the other hand, as we heard last week, entered the Jordan to be baptized which caused the heavens to part and the Spirit descend upon him like a dove and a voice from heaven to say *This is my son, the beloved with whom I well pleased*. Jesus then wanders in the wilderness for 40 days and triumphs over the devil's temptations.

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew continually draws connection between Jesus and the promises of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. I haven't got time to summarize them all, but I counted 7 major connections to such promises from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea, and Zechariah in Matthew. There are numerous other connections and repeats of the Matthean connections in the other Gospels and in the Epistles.

As I wrote last week, 50 years or so after the resurrection, followers of Jesus remained active in the synagogues. Only in the year 88 were Jesus followers expelled from the synagogues. From that expulsion it would be totally false to presume that Matthew's efforts were a failure. Many of those expelled who went on to become the foundations of the Christian Church were, indeed, Jews by birth as committed to the Law and the Prophets as they were to the Risen Christ.

So called Christians for two millennia have been all too ready to heap calumny and death upon those Jews who remained faithful to their original calling and did not become followers of Jesus. Those persecutors of the Jews who purported to be Christians, by their very behaviour, justified the decision of some Jews to reject Jesus. Thankfully in this post-holocaust world some parts of the Church and the Synagogue have learned to peacefully co-exist and even collaborate. Regrettably, there are still some on either side who bring shame on each of their religions.

What is the message from the passage this evening to us as members of a now minority movement seeking to serve Jesus the Christ. The essentials are in the clause; *I come not to abolish but to fulfill*. Fulfill is the key word. If you think of the ten commandments in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, I think you would agree, you think of *Thou shall not....* Only the 5th commandment about Honouring your father and your mother is phrased in the positive. Jesus makes clear he did not come to abolish; he came to fulfill. Fulfill effectively means, *You shall*. Of course, you shall not kill stands, but it is fulfilled by *You shall love!* Love your God, Love your enemies, love your neighbour. Simply to avoid atheism, idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft, and covetousness is not enough. Think of St. Paul's words in 1st Corinthians: *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

Please keep this in mind as we soon shall say the Shema together. Amen