

# Sermon Text for January 29, 2023

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## *Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:13-15*

### *“From out of Strasburg I have called you”*

In April of 2006 I shared with my congregation in Palatka that our family had been called out of Palatka and to Moscow, Russia. We loved our church family and they seemed to put up with us fairly well, but they were worried. We had one family ask us how are you going to learn Chinese? Another well meaning family asked us: where are your kids going to stay, who will watch them while you are in Russia. Actually, one of the main reasons why we went from sunny Florida to bitter Russia was because of our kids so that they could experience a culture and a way of life that was different from what they were used to.

When we felt called from out of Moscow, Russia Strasburg was one of three churches that I was considering. You need to know that your Pastor Nominating Committee was incredibly persistent. I had taken Strasburg off my list because logistically it was not going to work as I took a week off from my work in Russia to visit and preach at potential churches. I just didn't have the time. I was told from the PNC, we will take any time that you have. After my visit I was torn, Strasburg was not my first choice, but Bethany had a dream, one that Stacy shared with me after we made our final decision which was Strasburg. In her dream we were all on a plane heading to Washington DC which was a church I was considering. But in her dream in mid-flight the pilot came on and said we are changing course to Strasburg. Then he added, free ice cream for everyone! All three of my girls worked at the Strasburg Creamery. Who said prophecy is dead?

Both of our Scriptures today we find God making a statement that out of Egypt he has called his people to go and serve the world. We are going to take that statement and apply it to here, little old Strasburg, and say that out of Strasburg, no matter who you are, I have called you. God calls every single one of us out of your comfort zone and when that happens we have to respond. This Gospel of Righteousness that we have dared to begin together sets a path for us to act in accordance with the will of God by answering God's call. Let's read.

### **READ**

Hosea the prophet is really someone who you would think might have a beef or two again the Lord. He is commanded by God to marry someone who is described as a prostitute but we would be better off saying someone whom you know from the beginning of the relationship will

never, ever be faithful to you. No matter how faithful you are, she will never, ever, no matter what, be faithful to you.

And so in the midst of this metaphor of God being the prophet who marries this woman who is unfaithful, who is Israel, you have a promise that God will not only remain faithful but will deliver the people of Israel, this unfaithful people, from the most difficult and tragic times in their life. And what was the most difficult and tragic time in the life of the Israelites by the time we get to Hosea. Clearly the one historical event of all historical events would be the time that God led the people of Israel out of their slavery and bondage and out of the land of Egypt.

This was such a powerful and defining moment in the life of the people of Israel that anyone who was a Jew would be able to describe in detail how God delivered the people of Israel. For us US folks it would be like the revolutionary war, probably the most defining moment in our nation's history. So what we read in vs.1 of chapter 11 is this promise from God that he would deliver the Israelites out of bondage and slavery and captivity and out of Egypt into the promised land.

But Israel, we read in the following verses in Hosea if you kept reading, but Israel remained unfaithful. Even this historic and miraculous deliverance did not change their faithfulness, they continued to cheat on God. This phrase that we read and upon which we base in large part our sermon, out of Egypt I have called my son, is an indication of God's faithfulness and compassion for God's people despite their rejection of God. Do you hear that First Presbyterian of Strasburg. God remains faithful even in the midst of our unfaithfulness.

In Matthew we get this verse in Hosea quoted by the Gospel writer. Just for context this event of the holy family fleeing to Egypt happens chronologically after Jesus is born, after the wise men visit him and after they depart and go in a different direction and away from Herod because they were told by God to do so. Then we pick up. Look at vs.14 where Joseph once again acts upon the words of an angel that is sent to him in order to protect his family and in order to keep his family not only safe but intact.

The first time an angel came to Joseph in Matthew it was so that he would not divorce Mary. This time it is so that he could keep his family safe and he is told to take them to Egypt. Now, this is not totally unusual. We find many times in Scripture that when the people of God are fleeing they often do go to Egypt. Look at I Kings 11:40 and we read: . Another Israelite fleeing from a ruler and waiting until he dies before he returns.

The details of vs.14 are also familiar. Joseph is told and as soon as he is told he gathers his family by night and they flee. Remember when the Passover took place, when the angel of death came over the houses in Egypt and the people when they fled, by night as soon as Pharaoh realized what happened he told the people to leave immediately, do not linger, and by night they fled Egypt. Joseph hears and he obeys, he remains righteous and acts according to the will of God even when it seems incredibly risky to leave and head for Egypt.

It might be hard for us in Strasburg to draw a parallel from being called out of Egypt to serve the Lord or from out of Strasburg to serve Him. We have today an opportunity to call 18 people into service as church officers. These 18 people, that is a huge number, have heard the call of God telling them to stay right here where you are and serve me right here and right now. Do my work here in this church. We have so much to do together.

We have another big New Member's class, another big confirmation class coming into the church over the next few months and getting all of them assimilated and involved in the life of the church so that we can launch into the future is not easy work. But it is what you have signed up for. We are all called to serve in this church and in a way that it would become the hands and feet of Jesus.

But not all of us. Some of us have been called out of Strasburg. I have emphasized so much in my ministry how this church is to be the heart of the Borough. We are called to be a Matthew 25 church that has the opportunity to provide and meet all the needs that people may have. Does that sound familiar? That is our vision for this church, that anyone who is in need knows that they can come into these doors and they will have that need met, no matter what it may be. But not all of us are called to serve in Strasburg, or in this local community, or even in Lancaster County.

We have sent out Simeon and Allison Harrar and their children because they have been called to go out of Strasburg. We have called the Garner family because they have been called to go out of Strasburg. We support Vladimir Tatarnikov who came and spoke here and then from out of Strasburg went back and continues to work in his homeland of Belarus. We are considering supporting Melissa Long who has definitely been called out Strasburg to serve in Boston with Boy with a ball.

I think some of you have been called to serve out of Strasburg and you either don't know it or you know it and you are choosing to not listen to the voice of God. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a myriad of mission opportunities for you to take part in. If you are a couple

you may be called to go overseas and do God's work and if you do you will experience God's fullness because you have to rely on him day in and day out as missionaries. Trust me, I know. There is no greater or closer walk with the Lord than serving him overseas.

Or maybe you are a family with young kids. This is the perfect time to listen to God's voice and look for ways to serve him out of Strasburg in a foreign land where he has called you. Wait, what? This is the most sensitive time in their life, yes, exactly, it is, and it is the most important time in their life to learn that other people who are different from them have just as much value and have just as much to offer as people who are like them. That was why we left for Russia with a 1<sup>st</sup> grader, 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, and 5<sup>th</sup> grader. Your kids will thank you later, maybe much later, but they will, emphasis on later.

Are you retired? What better time than to look for opportunities to use your gifts and your skills that the Lord has given to you and use them in places across the seas where those gifts and skills might be hard to come by? Oh, it is a risk reward, without a doubt. But staying for Joseph would have meant death for him and his family, but leaving was so risky. For us the options are not nearly as extreme. If we stay, our children will grow up and be fine, but they won't be exposed to life beyond these walls. If you do go, they will return enriched and aware that they can change the world.

When was the last time that you told your child that they could change the world? Not that they were loved, or had value, yes, that is important, but we believe that every single person here, especially the children, can change the world when they are in a relationship with Jesus Christ. When is the last time you told your kids that they are able to change the world. When you serve Jesus as a family in the world, it is so much easier to see that possibility. Tell your kids that they have it in them, that they have what it takes to change the world. I believe it of my kids, you should believe it of your kids too.

The Holy Family left for safety and security. I call on you to be aware that maybe God is also calling you to leave for the fullness of the experience of serving God outside of these walls, that maybe, just maybe, out of Strasburg he has called you. Amen.