

Temple Talk for Refugee and Immigrant Sunday

Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'" (Matthew 25:42-45)

Good Morning! Today is Refugee and Immigrant Sunday, a day when we remember the words of Jesus that when we welcome the stranger, we are actually welcoming Jesus himself and when we fail to welcome the stranger, we are rejecting him. What does that mean at this moment in history?

Much of the public debate focuses on how to limit immigration and deport those who come here without proper documents. However, if we come to these issues from a faith perspective, we are called to compassion. Compassion moves us to ask deeper questions. Is our system for dealing with refugees and migrants effective, logical, fair and humane? If not, how does it need to be changed?

The Lutheran Church of El Salvador is one of our companion synods; they have shared horror stories with us about the gangs in El Salvador. One of the Council members of one of our churches in this synod tells the story of her sister in El Salvador who owned a little store in her village, and whose nephew was killed when she could not pay the extortion fee to the gangs. This is a common occurrence in a country where the murder toll is one of the highest in the world. Whether asylum seekers are children and youth running from Central America or families from Syria, they are often fleeing unspeakable violence. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 1 out of every 122 human beings on earth is either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum as a result of violence. The US has had a commitment since 1948 along with most other countries in the world to receive those who are fleeing violent persecution in their own countries. However, we do not supply free lawyers to asylum seekers. If a teenager from El Salvador has a lawyer, about 80% are judged to qualify for asylum. If they are not able to pay for a lawyer, only 7% receive asylum; imagine having to represent yourself in court in a language you

don't speak, facing a system you don't understand. Our companion Synod tells us that children and youth who are deported are regularly killed. Recent policies instituted by this federal administration make it even more difficult to obtain asylum.

What can we do to help? First of all we can pray. We can educate ourselves by studying the LIRS website, which also offers several Bible Study resources as well as advocacy opportunities (lirs.org.) Our Synod also operates a program called "Guardian Angels" which sends volunteers into immigration court to accompany children, youth and their families from Central America to try to help them obtain trustworthy legal support and social services. You can donate to or volunteer for the Guardian Angels program. You could also donate to the Synod Justice Team or Global Partners Team for the Lutheran Church of El Salvador. Next Summer the Global Partners Team is sponsoring a trip to El Salvador from July 31st to August 7th, so you can see for yourself what is going on there. Lastly, the Justice Team receives regular information on ecumenical opportunities to advocate for an immigration system that is truly effective, logical, fair and humane. Thank you for your time.