

Sermon Talking Points

Dear Preacher,

As we enter Immigration Month in EDSJ, we invite you to consider our sacred texts through this lens. This can be a challenging topic to bring up with congregations and we trust the Holy Spirit will lead you in the right message each week. To assist, we have compiled some notes to consider that may spark a way to include immigration awareness in even a small part of your sermon. A note...once we hit the season after Pentecost there are Track 1 and Track 2 options. Additional celebrations are also included after the Sunday commentary. May God bless you with courage and deep love in your sermon preparation.

The SJRAISE Team of EDSJ

May 30 (Trinity Sunday)

John 3:1-17

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him: Our salvation as a human race, regardless of our racial, ethnic, gender, sex, age, sexual orientation or ability is not determined by our status as documented or undocumented. Our salvation is rooted in the love of God made incarnate in Jesus Christ, who was a refugee as a child fleeing death. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus challenges Nicodemus to recognize that human control is not God given, but fleeting like the wind/breath. The true power is in the Spirit and is the essence of our ability to be made new. Through the Spirit, the church is challenged to be made new through acts of courage and challenging our traditions that prioritize those with established history or documentation over the new, recently welcomed, or undocumented.

Isaiah 6:1-8

The coal on the altar reminds us of our need to confess our sin. Paired with the Gospel, we confess our failure to challenge the status quo and advocate for the least of these among us, especially in the immigrant community.

Psalms 29 and Romans 8:12-17

Psalms 29 reminds us of God as the source of all strength and blessing. This has historically been used to justify colonized concepts that declare those who “have” or have “worked for it” are preferred by God. Immigration limitation arguments are often rooted in this concept (If you are “in” you are blessed, if not, you have to earn it). Paired with Romans, it reminds us that the blessings of God are for all people (community) and are given through the work of the Spirit. The unjust use of laws to restrict or withhold access to the shared blessing is in direct opposition to the Spirit. As a communal (catholic) church, we celebrate the spirit of adoption and salvation without preference and recognize ALL people as heirs to the kingdom by advocating for just immigration policies.

Illustration/Invitation/Challenge: Confess our sin that places preference for those who “have” and invite the congregation to suggest ways in which they might balance the voice of the new, stranger, and marginalized.

June 6

Mark 3:20-35, 2 Corinthians 4:13-51

A house divided: We can be people of differing opinions and viewpoints, but when our commitment to love our neighbor as ourselves is put aside in order to create barriers which separate us from one another, then we are not living out the Great Commandment. Christ challenged the systems of power in the name of justice and love and was condemned as evil.

"Who are my mother and my brothers?...Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.": As the People of God acting in the Spirit, we make up the household of God, which means that every person we encounter is a sibling in Christ.

Track 1: 1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15); Psalm 138

Those in power will always do what it takes to sustain and grow their power. They will even deny the essence of life for others in order to do so. Psalm 138 is a direct reply to this, reminding us God will favor and lift up the lowly. Paired with the Gospel and 2 Corinthians, we can see that those who challenge those systems will be hated, but to have courage for when we act in the Spirit, we are in unity with God.

Track 2: Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130

Our nature is to hide when we have sinned. It is difficult to name our failure. Historically, this Genesis passage has been used to justify the subjugation of people of color. In doing so, it is yet another moment when we hide from the truth of our circumstance and deny the power of confession to God so that we might be made whole. Psalm 130 reminds us that God has the power to redeem, and this is the truth that frees us to courage and confession to God and our neighbor. Paired with the Gospel and 2 Corinthians, we see that Christ calls us to counter- intuitive and counter-cultural actions as part of both our confession and forgiveness.

Illustration/Invitation/Challenge: detention centers misuse their funds and are a “for-profit” industry that profits off the unjust incarceration of human beings. Their lobby for retaining their status is an example of power-holding.

Level Up: As a congregation, send a letter to state legislators encouraging continued work toward just legislation and closing loopholes (see SJRAISE page for most recent actions to write advocacy letters).

June 13

Mark 4:26-34, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10,[11-13],14-17

"The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." The kingdom of God has room for all, not just some. It does not matter if the birds (people of God) are the same, sing the same songs, or have the same coloring; there is more than enough room for all. Many times our congregations think they do not have the resources to begin new ministry or elicit change that would welcome everyone. The mustard seed is of no note when raw. But when heated, it cracks open and releases pungent flavor. Even 2 or 3 cracked seeds can ruin an entire dish when cooking! Small or limited congregations have potential impact far greater than they imagine.

Track 1: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20

It is human nature to categorize. We use human standards to decide who is worthy and who is not. God's standards look to the heart and often surprise and challenge us.

Paired with the Gospel and 2 Corinthians, we see that Christ uses parables to challenge his listeners to think and act in new and radical ways, aligning us to think more like God. The human point of view will dismiss those who are without "status" (poor, undocumented, uneducated, etc) but God will lift them up and honor the lowly over those with status every time. Our job is to learn to value like God does.

Track 2: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14

The church can be like the trees of Lebanon and mustard, but many times we are not. We are not a safe place for all, especially when we lean into nationalist primacy in our worship spaces, language or actions. Paired with the gospel, the good news is that it only takes a small and seemingly inconsequential thing (sprig of a tree branch or mustard seed) to grow something new and wonderful.

Illustration/Challenge/Invitation: Have a sprig of a plant that is unrooted in water. Then one that is rooted in water. Visually show them the power of a small cutting to generate new life. We can trust that in our Baptismal waters, we are fed and nourished to grow new life and ministry for the church which can become a safe place for all.

Level Up: Share about the large numbers of refugees who are approved for admission already but remain incarcerated because they do not have a sponsor. Invite the congregation to sponsor a family (or more!).

June 20

Mark 4:35-41

Stilling of the storm--"Peace! Be still...Why are you afraid?": Sometimes welcoming the stranger amongst us, extending hospitality to others we are unfamiliar with can create anxiety and fear. What if instead of being afraid we become open to the possibility that the other has something to share with us that strengthens our faith and deepens our ministry?

Track 1: 1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20

Yet again we see assumptions of who has power based on visual information. The power and gift of the Spirit show up in unexpected places. Recognizing we cannot force control over all circumstances frees us to begin to look elsewhere for hope and peace. Immigrant and refugee families place their very lives in the trust that God will provide the strength when needed. Church has lost much of its traditional power—and now we are freed to see and experience power in a whole new way—by submitting to God’s vision. We do not need to be afraid of the strangers in our midst, but to welcome them, for they may be the ones who offer us peace or victory.

or

1 Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16; Psalm 133

What might change in our world if we loved with abandon the way Jonathan and David loved and trusted one another? We would win wherever we go, just as David did. Paired with the Gospel we hear a lesson which points to trusting that God will provide what we need in vulnerable moments, so we do not need to be afraid to be vulnerable. Consider how vulnerable folks are who leave all they own and literally walk their shoes off their feet to get to safety.

Track 2: Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32 The power of God knows no limits. It is enough to raise up mountains and lay out seas and skies. When we trust in that power instead of worldly power, we can have peace over risking having “enough” to share. God has made enough and God’s power to do so has not ended. Trusting in this power, the power of waves to sink a boat, and keeping our eyes on God will offer not only deliverance, but peace.

Challenge/Invitation: Contribute to support the work of Faith in the Valley during the collection today as we close this month-long focus on immigration.