

Jesus Is Undocumented

Who Is My Neighbor? · Week Three

Rev. Blaine Tinsley · Unity on Maui · Sunday, September 6, 2026

THE TITLE THAT STOPPED YOU

When you saw the title *Jesus Is Undocumented* — what happened inside you? A jolt of recognition? A flicker of discomfort? That reaction is this morning's teaching. Before Jesus was a teacher — before he healed a leper or told a single story — he was a refugee child whose family crossed a border in the night to escape a government that wanted him dead. That is not a metaphor. That is the Gospel.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

We have domesticated Jesus. Two thousand years of paintings and Sunday school curricula have given us a Jesus who is serene, blue-eyed, and vaguely Scandinavian — floating above history. That Jesus is a fiction. The Jesus of the Gospels was a Galilean peasant: poor, brown-skinned, Aramaic-speaking, born into a people living under brutal Roman occupation. To the empire, Jesus and his neighbors were bodies to be taxed, controlled, and if necessary crucified on a public hill. That is the world he was born into — and the very first thing that happened was that someone in power decided he was a threat.

KING HEROD AND THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Herod, hearing a child had been born whom wise men called king of the Jews, did what people in power do when threatened — he ordered the massacre of every male child under two years old in Bethlehem. Matthew tells us what happened next in twelve words: *"He rose, took the child and his mother, and departed for Egypt."*

Joseph gets a warning in a dream. *Get up. They are coming. Go — now.* And so they go. In the night, with whatever they can carry, across the border into Egypt — a foreign country, a foreign language, a foreign culture — without invitation, without documentation, without any guarantee of welcome. They are seeking asylum from political violence. In our own moment, we have a word for this: refugees. The infant Jesus enters human history as an undocumented child in a foreign land. The divine chooses, from the very beginning, to be found among the displaced — the ones whose survival depends on the mercy of strangers.

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

Near the end of his life — just days before his arrest and crucifixion — Jesus gathered his closest disciples on the Mount of Olives for what would be one of his last teachings. He told them a story about the end of all things: a great King sits in judgment, and the nations are brought before him. He separates them the way a shepherd separates sheep from goats at the end of the day — the sheep to his right, the goats to his left.

To those on his right, the King says something unexpected. He doesn't praise their theology or their religious devotion. He says: *"I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick and in prison, and you came to visit me."*

The people on his right are genuinely confused. They have no memory of doing any of this for a king. *"Lord,"* they ask, *"when did we ever see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger — and take care of you?"*

The King's answer is the heart of the whole story: *"Truly I tell you — whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me."*

In other words: every time you showed up for someone who was hungry, homeless, sick, or imprisoned — someone society had pushed to the margins — you were serving the King himself. Not symbolically. Not as a spiritual exercise. The King is saying: *that person was me.* You just didn't know it at the time.

And here is the detail that stops every careful reader: ***the righteous didn't know.*** They did not feed the hungry as a spiritual practice. They did not identify the divine before acting. They simply fed them — showed up for another human being without calculating whether that person deserved it. And it turned out that was exactly where the Christ was. All along. Waiting to be found.

CHARLES FILLMORE AND THE INDWELLING CHRIST

In Unity, we teach that the Christ is not a title belonging exclusively to the historical Jesus. The Christ is a Presence — the divine life fully expressing itself in and through every human being, not as a potential to be earned but as the deepest truth of every soul. Charles Fillmore taught that the Christ-presence is not the exclusive property of Christianity, not the reward of the faithful, not the designation of the deserving. It is the ground of being itself, expressing uniquely through every individual life.

Every face at every border is a face where Christ is waiting to be recognized.

THE AMERICAN MOMENT — NAMING WHAT IS HAPPENING

Something is happening that every person of faith must reckon with: a sustained effort to define belonging narrowly — to determine whose humanity is conditional, whose children deserve safety. Families are being separated. The word "illegal" is applied not to actions but to people — as if a human being can be illegal, as if the divine life can be undocumented. The King in the parable does not ask the stranger for papers before welcoming them. The haunting question the parable asks is not "what does the law say?" — it is:

"When did we see you, Lord?"

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN THE STRANGER?

Remember a moment when you were the one who did not belong — when you walked into a room and felt the temperature drop, your presence tolerated rather than celebrated. That memory is a doorway. The person who knows what it is to be the stranger is uniquely equipped to recognize the stranger in someone else.

Dolly Parton — gone just days ago — knew what it was to be outside the circle of who counts. Too poor, too flashy, too country, too much. She responded with eighty years of radical, unconditional welcome. Her answer to every boundary was this:

"I just love and accept people where they are for who they are." — Dolly Parton

WHEN DID WE SEE YOU, LORD? JESUS IS UNDOCUMENTED.

The divine entered history as a refugee child. The divine identified itself with the hungry, the stranger, the imprisoned. You have already seen him — in every face your world taught you to scroll past. The only question is whether you are willing to recognize him. Will you look closely enough to see who is there?

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE Matthew 25:40 "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me."	REFLECTION When have you been the stranger? Who recognized the Christ in you when you needed it most? How did that change you?	PRACTICE This week, when you encounter someone whose belonging feels conditional — pause. Ask silently: "Where is the Christ in this face?" Notice what happens.
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AFFIRMATION

I recognize the living Christ in every face I meet. No border, no barrier, no boundary can separate me from the love that lives in all people.

A BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN AND THOSE WHO HAVE LOOKED AWAY

Go now — the one you seek has already found you. He was at the border. He was in the ditch. He was in the face you almost scrolled past. May you cross every road that love asks you to cross. May you welcome the stranger the way you would welcome the Christ — because you will never know the difference. Go in peace. Go in love. **And so it is.**