

Psalm 82

God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgement:
'How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?
Selah
Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'

They have neither knowledge nor understanding,
they walk around in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

I say, 'You are gods,
children of the Most High, all of you;
nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince.'

Rise up, O God, judge the earth;
for all the nations belong to you!

Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

The Word of the Lord...

In May and June I tried out an experiment and participated in a Bible study here at the church that used the Scriptures from the lectionary as the basis of its study. I have a few colleagues who do the same thing, one of them I borrowed the title from: Pastor's BS (for Bible study, of course). I won't speak for any of the participants, but for me it was a tremendous blessing to hear what others had to say about the Scriptures for the coming Sunday; a tremendous blessing... and sometimes a challenge.

Our last meeting before we broke for the summer were the readings for today. By now you have recognized the Luke passage as being the Good Samaritan and when asked to reflect what they heard in this passage a few members of the group said, "immigration."

Now I am not one to shy away from controversial topics, but I do try to not preach on them in the heat of the moment. Truth is, I am just as influenced as anyone else may be by the current spin being put on the issue of the day, and I want to make sure the Word proclaimed from this place of privilege is indeed the Word of God and not the word on the street.

When the Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighbors Act , better known as Arizona's State Bill 1070, hit the headlines the pastoral staff met and talked and prayed about what should be said from the pulpit and when it should be said. Then I did a really radical thing - I read the Bill.¹

To be fair, there was an amendment made to the law a week after it was adopted which changed the language so that someone could not be randomly stopped and asked to show papers proving they were in America legally. Now those papers can only be asked for during "a lawful stop, detention or arrest."

The fear is that this will lead to racial profiling and will create an environment where those in the immigrant community will fear working with local authorities to report or witness to crimes. The fear is that those who need or whose children need medical care will not seek help. The fear is that this bill throws everyone whose skin is darker than mine into the classification of criminal – guilty until proven innocent.

And then there is the other part of the bill which allows the detention of anyone who may be with someone who is undocumented. I'll allow an excerpt from a letter written by representatives of our denomination to members of Congress, Arizona Governor Janice K. Brewer and President Barack Obama explain why this is an issue:

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to express our conviction that you must enact comprehensive immigration reform this year. As people of faith and the leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we are keenly aware of the devastating effects our broken immigration system has on the lives of individuals, immigrant and non-immigrant families, and our communities. The bigotry, trauma, and fear that will result from the recent new law enacted in Arizona, SB 1070, which criminalizes those who are found "with" undocumented persons and requires law enforcement officers to identify and detain such persons, serves to underscore the necessity of action at the federal level.

Churches are on the front lines of caring for families being ripped apart by our broken immigration system. Traumatized citizen children left behind when parents are deported are but one example of the ways the current system destroys the fabric of community life, the integrity of healthy families, and the safety of individual persons. Church workers are also at the forefront of offering relief and services to immigrants, regardless of documentation status. Arizona's new law will put at risk those workers and others who are called simply to offer the most basic of humanitarian assistance. As Christians, we cannot stand by idly while our brothers and sisters die on our borders from exposure and thirst or languish in poorly equipped detention facilities, nor should we be required to do so by any law.

The letter goes on to say:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) therefore supports congressional action in 2010 on comprehensive immigration reform that creates a process for undocumented immigrants in the U.S. to earn their legal status; reduces waiting periods and upholds family unity; protects workers from exploitation; and provides efficient channels of entry for new migrant workers².

It is signed by then Moderator, Bruce Reyes-Chow, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Gradye Parsons and the Executive Director of the General Assembly Mission Council, Linda Valentine.

There are some that say the church should stay out of politics. Quite frankly, I am often one of them. But when I read laws like the one just recently passed in Arizona up against this morning's familiar passage of Scripture from Luke, it is clear the two are not compatible.

The truth is, unlike some other hot topics of our contemporary day the Bible is fairly straightforward on the issue of immigration and illegal aliens.

Exodus 22:21 - *You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*

Leviticus 19:34 – *The alien who resides among you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.*

And from the New Testament Hebrews 13:2 - *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels unawares.*

In an article written for a Seattle newspaper, UCC minister and lecturer Anthony B. Robinson writes, "Why is the matter of the immigrant or the "foreigner who resides among you" such a concern of the Jewish and Christian faiths and what bearing does it have on the current immigration debate in our country? As for the first question, the answer is that God didn't want the ancient Hebrews to forget where they had come from, or how they had gotten where they were, namely, the Promised Land. They had come from slavery in Egypt. They knew what it was like to be exploited and taken advantage of. Now that they had land and wealth they shouldn't forget that hadn't always been the case.

Ring any bells? It should. Most Americans are the descendents of immigrants."³

There are many ways immigration in the United States of America is a very complex issue. American laws, both the spoken legal kind and the understood cultural kind, make arguments and discussions about this issue multifaceted and complicated.

Biblically however, there is only one faithful response: mercy.

Which of these three was like a neighbor?

It was the one who treated him kindly, the one who showed mercy.

The greek word used is *eleos* and it means more than just doing good. It “suggests blessing and unwarranted compassion as well as leniency. It is about pardon, kindness, strength and even rescue and generosity.”⁴

Mercy is looking at someone and knowing they don't deserve your kindness for whatever reason, their own actions, or the actions of their group/race/nation... and then being kind anyway because their status as a beloved child of God has a value above their classification.

I do not stand before you proclaiming this is easy.
I do not even stand before you proclaiming where to begin.

I do stand before you proclaiming that because mercy has been shown to us through God's faithfulness and steadfast love, it is indeed our Call and command to show that mercy to our brothers and sisters of this world.

“Standing alongside family and friends and strangers petitioning God and calling down God's mercy, we begin to see ourselves linked as the mercy-needing ones. All of us with our hard lives. All of us with sins and regrets. All of us in need of strength and blessing and rescue. All of us at the hand of robbers, and as the robbers... All of us made neighbors in Jesus Christ.”⁵

Mercy is the story of our faith...
Mercy is the commandment of our Call...
Mercy is the great commission of our lives...

Which of these three was like a neighbor?
It was the one who treated him kindly, the one who showed mercy.

Go. And do likewise.

Let us Pray: “Have mercy, O God. Make us merciful. Make us mercy bearers... Make us more than good, make us merciful. Beyond bloodlines, and country and creed: make us mercy to all we meet.”⁶

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>

² Dated April 29, 2010, <http://oga.pcusa.org/newsstories/congress-ltr-ariz-imm-law-2010.htm>

³ Anthony B. Robinson, http://www.seattlepi.com/opinion/270781_tony19.html,

⁴ Jennifer L. Lord. “Reflections on the Lectionary: Sunday, July 11, Luke 10:25-37” *The Christian Century*. June 29, 2010, p. 19.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.