

RESOURCES on SANCTUARY AND SOLIDARITY

Questions for Reflection:

- How would you describe your politics and/or political identity?
- Who or what were the formative influences of your politics or political identity?
- How should we talk about the pressing issues of our communities and country in our churches and places of worship?

Introduction

At St Jude's, our Mission Covenant guides our direction somewhat like a spiritual strategic plan. We know we strive to be a welcoming and safe place for everyone, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This has implications for how we talk to one another and with each other, especially about difficult or controversial topics.

We know that not everyone holds the same views, and some are a minority, and we want to practice courageous conversations and hold mutually respectful discussions. Bishop Mary says that "It is critical and productive to explore together with civility how our faith informs our values, opinions and actions."

Today is a wonderful opportunity to practice respectful listening and discussion. We have a decision that the vestry wants to make, to publicly offer practical support to other congregations who have declared sanctuary for immigrants facing deportation. We're going to have a living room conversation about it.

There's a lot of background to understand about sanctuary – here is a going brief introduction. Please read the letter from Bishop Mary below, and the other background resources on the website.

Scripture and politics

First, the Scriptures and politics – there are different ways of approaching it. One is that the central tenet of our faith, what we are commanded to do, is to 'Love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves.' This has enormous implications for us when our neighbor is an immigrant or a refugee.

Another is to look at Scripture, There are hundreds of verses about justice, care for the poor, the danger of wealth, and especially in the prophetic tradition, the writings of the prophets.

Three examples:

Isaiah 58:6 ff:

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Amos 5:21 -24

“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn

assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Micah 6:6-8:

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Immigrants, Sanctuary and Solidarity:

Besides loving your neighbor as yourself, there are many very clear Scripture references to the sojourner/alien/stranger = immigrant/refugee. In biblical terms, a stranger is any person who dwells in a land without being a citizen of that land.

Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are clear and consistent when it comes to how we are to treat the stranger. Across the books of both testaments, the Bible consistently spells out that it is the responsibility of the citizen to ensure that the immigrant, the stranger, the refugee is respected, welcomed and cared for. The story of the Bible is the story of immigrants and outsiders.

Genesis 12ff: The journey of Abraham from his homeland to Canaan, a land that is already occupied by other people, and tells the story of how he and his family make their way in a territory and society that is not their own, where they have neither land nor kin.

The Exodus story reinforces the status of Israel as strangers in a land not their own. Pharaoh's oppression of Israelites is grounded in an attitude that "The Israelite people are too numerous for us...let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase, otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us." Pharaoh was skilled at governing through fear.

Israel leaves Egypt as refugees, and encounters nations that, out of fear or sheer intransigence, do not want to let them pass, forcing them through the harsh wilderness.

The book of Ruth, about a widow - a foreigner who comes to Israel, works as a laborer in the fields, hoping for a better life. This foreigner, immigrant, stranger, ends up becoming an ancestor of King David, and ultimately Jesus.

All three of the great law code of the Hebrew bible in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy have the same command about how to treat the stranger:

"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him.

The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

(Lev 19:33-34)

The Golden Rule, love your neighbor as yourself, carries equal weight with the stranger. Deuteronomy says “You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger,” and “God loves the stranger, providing him with food and clothing;” and “you too must love the stranger.” Isaiah: “Give advice, offer counsel...let Moab’s outcasts find asylum in you; be a shelter for them.”

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus and his family become political refugees, which is what is reflected on our corner banner that says ‘Immigrants and Refugees Welcome.’

Matthew 25 in which Jesus separates the sheep and the goats, or the righteous and the unrighteous, says ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ and “I was a stranger and you did not welcome me.” When the judged ask when they ever treated Jesus in such a manner, Jesus answers “Just as you did to the least of these...(or did not to the least of these), you did to me...(or you did not do to me).

The books of Romans and Hebrews call on those who follow Jesus to “extend hospitality to strangers.”

Scripture makes a clear and strong case. The challenge is how to translate that clarity and the call to love our neighbor as ourselves, to act with compassion, into modern day governance and politics in a globalized and complex world. We all have our own understandings. Perhaps it comes down to what any one of us, or we at St Jude’s, would do, or will do, if a

refugee or an immigrant lands on our doorstep and asks for support, or for shelter, or for sanctuary.

This is a conversation that is both clear and simple, yet complex in application. Let us take time to listen to the nuances of our thoughts and opinions. Let us base our discussions not on fear but on love.