

JUNE 2019

LOVING THE STRANGER

BY MICHAEL KELLER

There is a lot of discussion about immigration and how the church should respond to the current issues. While I'm not qualified to discuss the politics surrounding some of these discussions, the Bible has plenty to say about how to love and care for the immigrants among us. Much of it is based on what the Bible has to say about the experience of the exodus.

If you were an Israelite wandering in the desert during the exodus from Egypt you could have described your experience this way: we **had been in bondage** in Egypt, enslaved in a foreign land and under the **threat of death**. But God

showed mercy, and we **took shelter** under the **blood of a lamb**, which literally coated our doorframe.

God led us out of slavery **through his of grace** — not because of anything we did to merit it. Afterwards God gave us his **law** to follow because it told us **how to live**. While we are in the wilderness life is hard, and though we often don't know where we are going, we **have hope** that we will eventually be **brought** into the **promised land** one day

That is what every Israelite at some point could have said.

Interestingly, Alec Motyer, in his commentary, points out

that Christians can say the same thing. Christians were in **slavery**, in **bondage** to sin, we took **shelter under the blood of the true lamb** — Jesus who sacrificed himself for us, **led us out of slavery by sheer grace**, and now we **obey** him out of love and gratitude. While we are still in the wilderness **life is hard**, and we are wandering and are aliens in a foreign land, but we **have hope** that one day we will be **with him in the promised land** — one day we will be brought home. The parallels between the OT exodus and the NT understanding of what it means to be a Christian

(Continued on page 2)

EMBODYING GOD'S MERCY THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY

“And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”
– 2 Corinthians 9:8

Mercy is the impulse that makes us sensitive to the pain and struggles of others

and gives us a desire to alleviate them. Our Diaconate extends God's mercy by meeting the physical, emotional, and financial needs of congregants at all four Redeemer churches who are facing seasons of particular difficulty. As an exclusively donor-funded ministry, the work of the Diaconate is very literal-

ly only possible by God's grace working in and through the generous hearts of His people, prompting them to financially support the Diaconate.

Last month each of our four churches sought to facilitate the continuation of this unique avenue of care and assistance

(Continued on page 5)

are pronounced.

On one level, to be a Christian means to understand that we were all once enslaved, we were in bondage — but now we have been rescued. We are to see ourselves as outsiders and foreigners as noted in 1 Peter 1:1, which is addressed, “To God’s elect, exiles scattered through all the provinces.” Then in Hebrews 11:9, 10 the writer says “Abraham by faith made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country (here being an immigrant is positive), for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.”

In other words Christians are immigrants, we are foreigners, this is an identity we should own and embody because whatever physical place we call home can’t really be home. It’s a temporary residence.

I think we see this regularly in NYC where to some degree everyone knows what it feels like to be a foreigner. You can’t get on the subway without looking around and saying “whoa, I’m different from ev-

eryone else. I’m a stranger, I’m a foreigner.” It’s tiring to be an outsider and to live in NYC, because when you are a foreigner you don’t know the culture, you don’t know the language, you don’t know all the customs, which is exhausting.

This is one of the reasons I think we like to wear earphones on the subway — to block out the difference out there and stay inside our own heads. It’s hard to get outside yourself; it’s hard to get into another person’s world.

Christians should understand this particularly as well because on one level the people around us don’t quite get us, people don’t understand us. Our motives, our purpose, our customs are distinct and at some level the narratives that run our lives are different than those around us. It’s always awkward for me in a group setting when people ask what I do. Eventually it comes out, “I’m a minister at a Presbyterian church;” and suddenly it’s crickets — no one ever knows what to say!

Our reason to care and be good to all strangers and im-

migrants is that we were once that way ourselves — spiritually — and at the same time we still are physically. And if we really are immigrants, all of us, why are we not trying to help out our fellow immigrants? Go back to the Exodus account — if we were wandering out in the wilderness and knew what it was like to be disenfranchised for 40 years, then of course we would know what its like for others who are in the same situation, no matter where they are from in this world.

God commands us to be good to aliens and immigrants “because you, too, were once immigrants in a foreign land.” Exodus 22:21 “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt yourself.” Can we remember we were spiritually and still ARE physically aliens in a foreign land, and therefore we must take care of others who are as well? The exact way we take care, the process, the means, the degree are all factors that are conditional, but what is not conditional is the posture and

(Continued on page 5)

REDEEMER REPORT

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Redeemer East Side

Temple Israel Sanctuary
112 E75th St.
(btw Park & Lexington)
Services: 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.
& 5 p.m.

Redeemer West Side

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(btw Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services: 9:30 a.m.,
11:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

Redeemer Lincoln Square

New York Society for
Ethical Culture
2 W. 64th St.
(at Central Park West)
Service: 10:30 a.m.

Redeemer Downtown

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(btw 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.
DT LAB: Wednesdays at 7 p.m.

TURNING TOWARD LOVE

At the end of April Redeemer West Side's *Agora: Conversations for the Common Good* hosted a conversation between author Amy Julia Becker and her friend and fellow author, Andy Crouch, on the themes of her recent book, *White Picket Fences*, a meditation on what she's learned about privilege as the mother of a daughter with Down Syndrome.

"The evening reminded me of a wonderful multi-course meal or a symphony with multiple movements," said West Side Senior Pastor David Bisgrove, who welcomed the crowd on behalf of the West Side congregation. "Some aspects challenged the mind. Others the heart. But in the end there was a sense of beauty that inspired everyone in attendance to live out of the better angels of their nature."

Becker began by describing her own journey as a mother of a child with special needs, and her reflections on privilege from that perspective. "Over time," Becker says, "as I came to recognize the tremendous gift that Penny is, I recognized that as a person of privilege, I have also been cut off from the wonder, beauty, and wholeness of humanity, our full human diversity. I had been cut off from those things by my privilege."

Her thoughts were punctu-

ated by talks from Hope For New York affiliates Do For One and Young Life Upper West Side's Capernaum, both organizations that work to build bridges between people with and without disabilities on the Upper West Side. Then she and Crouch talked together about the themes of *White Picket Fences* and took questions from the crowd.

For Becker, the highlight of the night was hearing about a local basketball league in which typically developing high school students play ball with kids and adults with disabilities. Their coach had been invited to the evening by Young Life Capernaum. "I loved the sense of reciprocity that ran throughout the whole evening — that true relationships are ones in which everyone benefits," says Becker.

Andrew Oliver, founder and director of Do For One, said that the event was different from others he'd attended because it wasn't about solving people's problems: "It was about the need for meeting in a mutual place where we can all experience healing."

But for many that night, including Crouch, the highlight was a reading of a poem by Lenny Dominguez, a young man living with disability who has formed strong friendships through Do For One. He wasn't able to read his

poem as quickly as a typically abled person might, but all the guests that night had been given copies of his poem to follow along, and as he read, a palpable bond developed between him and the members of the audience.

"Relationships don't always work out as it is," Dominguez read, "because we can all break apart from each other.

"I don't know if many people feel that way, being lonely. Do you feel that way? Like you're stuck on an island?"

"Relationships Are An Everlasting Love & It Lasts Forever from Sundown Until The Break Of Dawn.

"People Need To Come Together As A Family, Find Peace & Work Together So They Can Bring Justice Around The World.

"What would justice look like in New York City, or in my home?"

"What do you think?"

"As Lenny read his poem in the context of his friendships with others in the room," says Crouch, "it really felt, at least for a few minutes, that we were in a completely unlonely place. I'll remember that for a long time."

GOSPEL HUMILITY AND THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

BY PETER ONG, HOPE FOR NEW YORK

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” This runs contrary to how many of us view our lives. Often, before embarking on any endeavor, we start by asking, “What will I get out of this?” or “Will this be worth my time?”

While it is important to steward our time in ways that will likely have the greatest positive effect, we should not make decisions based only on transactional outcomes. Rather, faithful presence and a posture of gospel humility are also important.

It is the discipline of self-forgetfulness and looking toward the gospel that we need to cultivate in our work of service. It is an acknowledgment that God, being rich in mercy, sent Christ to bear our sins and give us life. He, as our Savior, not only saves us, but also provides lavishly for us a new life as adopted children (Ephesians 1: 3-14; 2:1-10). This new life we did not acquire via our merit or success, but on the basis of His grace extended to us.

Erik Raymond, senior pastor at Redeemer Fellowship Church in Boston, describes gospel humility this way:

The Bible, and particularly the gospel, then gives us the proper perspective on God and us. When we see who God is and who we are then we are

properly humbled before him.

Thus though a sinner, I am safe, He pleads before the throne His life and death in my behalf, And calls my sins His own (Great God from Thee)

When the Apostle Paul wants to unfasten the Philip-pians’ kung-fu grip upon the mirror where they are gazing upon themselves, he writes, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

Pretty simple verse. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Got it. But how do I learn this humility? In short Paul says, feast on Christ ... There it is brothers and sisters.

When he shows us the depths of Christ’s humble service (Philippians 2:6-8) he quickly shows us that no one could ever give up more to serve more unworthy people. We are the ones who have been served therefore we are to likewise serve in this humility.

When we sit in the shadow of the cross we learn that nothing is beneath us in terms of service. We have been served by Christ in this glorious way — he laid down his life for us! We then need to walk in humility, which is, at its core, what it means to follow Jesus.

When you see God as you ought then you will see yourself as you ought. This will certainly help with thinking of yourself less. But, please, don’t stop there,

keep going. Treasure Christ. Delight in his doing and dying for you. Feast on Christ as you fast from self.

Christ, full of compassion, entered humanity. As Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin.” Christ saw us and, having experienced the brokenness of humanity, was moved in his heart.

Take a moment to read through these verses that speak to the compassion of Christ:

Matthew 14:13-14 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he **had compassion on them** and healed their sick.

Matthew 20:30-34 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to

(Continued on page 5)

MERCY THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

by holding a special offering. We witnessed congregants, compelled by the cause of mercy, who faithfully offered generous gifts in order to allow God to continue using the Diaconate to change lives and hearts going forward. These contributions to the Diaconate's Mercy Fund are far more

than just monetary gifts; they are what allow God to develop our churches into true communities of compassion for those in our faith family.

We are thankful for you, dear congregants, for sharing the resources you have in order to help bring the tender love of Jesus to the needy brothers

and sisters in our midst. Please accept our gratitude and our invitation to continue your giving toward our humble efforts to embody God's mercy to those in need through the Diaconate ministry.

To give to our Mercy Fund, visit redeemer.com/mercygift.

LOVING THE STRANGER ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

attitude found within our own identity as wanderers.

Jesus was the ultimate alien. His life was a life of being rejected, living as a foreigner with no one who understood him, rejected by the people he loved. He doesn't turn us away though we turned him away;

He doesn't withdraw. He says, "My life for yours, not your life for mine."

When you see that you were so precious to him he would die for you and pay the penalty for your sin, then he becomes precious to you. When that happens, finally you come

to him, but you don't just do that, you also adopt his mission and turn outward to meet the needs of others.

Since we were needy, but brought in by grace, how can we not do the same for others?

COMPASSION OF CHRIST ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 4)

do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." Jesus *had compassion on them* and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he *had compassion on them*, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

1 John 3:16-1 By this, we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought

to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

If we are guided by the example of Christ's humility in his humanity, it should prevent us from a posture of superiority, paternalism, judgment, or an "us vs. them" mentality.

Many of us want a God who rules through power, vengeance, and retribution, but the gospel shows us a compassionate Christ Jesus whose power

comes through sacrificial love on the cross, where he took upon himself all the wrath meant for us. Church historian Shelley Bruce said, "Christianity is the only major religion to have as its central event the humiliation of its God."

Let us have eyes to see this humble King and ask God to allow us to let go of our heroic image of a king and instead see the Lamb of God, riding His borrowed donkey, straight to His borrowed tomb.

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