

'I was a stranger and you welcomed me...'

—Matthew 25:35

— Sermon Resources on Immigration —



A project of Sojourners

3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010

www.sojournal.net

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”

Contents

Sample Sermons

“Making Room” <i>by Cardinal Roger Mahony</i>	3
“Who is my Neighbor?” <i>by Rev. Steve Yamaguchi</i>	4

Sermon Illustrations

“Compassion” <i>by Noel Castellanos</i>	5
“Hospitality” (Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:35) <i>by Rev. Dr. Kathlyn James</i>	5
“Justice and Family” (Micah 6:8) <i>by Rev. Derrick Harkins</i>	6
“Finding Jesus” (Matthew 25:31-46) <i>by Kit Danley</i>	6
“The Higher Calling” (Romans 12; 13:1-7) <i>by Dr. M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas)</i>	7

Biblical Stories of Immigration

Abraham	8
The Hebrews	9
Jesus	10
Christians “as foreigners and exiles”	10

Immigrant Stories from Today

Eduardo	11
Claudia	12
Liliana	12
Juan	12
Marta	13

Photos by Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Introduction: How to Use this Resource

This resource is designed to equip and inspire pastors with preaching material on the Christian teaching of hospitality and the biblical call to “welcome the stranger.” It includes two full sermons; perhaps more importantly, it features a series of sermon illustrations, biblical stories of migration, and stories of undocumented immigrants living in our country today.

Our hope is that you will incorporate the illustrations presented here in your sermons, whether they are about the command to love our neighbors or something else altogether. For example, you may consider inserting one of the anecdotes into a broader message, or you may want to pair a story of an immigrant from the Bible with one of the stories of current immigrants. Better still, you may have stories of local immigrants that will resonate more with your congregation. There are many ways to utilize the teachings in this packet, but the most important result is fostering greater understanding and openness among Christians with respect to the biblical call to embrace the other, whether it concerns the social outcast, the alien, the marginalized, or the stranger.

We at Sojourners recognize that there are no simple answers to solving our country’s impasse on immigration, but we do hope that, with greater understanding of the plight of immigrants today—both legal and undocumented—as well as further scriptural study of God’s heart for immigrants and laws to protect them, Christians can help forge a more compassionate and constructive dialogue on this issue.

Remember that these excerpts are merely conversation-starters, which invite you to expound on the ideas presented here. Where we have taken only excerpts, we have included links to the full text of articles or sermons. We commend you for your courage and leadership in addressing the immigration issue from a theological perspective, as it is an issue that is and will continue to be of pressing concern to our churches, our communities, and our country for years to come. —The Editors

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

SAMPLE SERMONS

“Making Room”

by Cardinal Roger Mahony, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles

Text: Mark 1:12-15

The gospel proclamation for the first Sunday of Lent (Mark 1:12-15) tells of the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, preparing for his ministry of announcing the good news of the reign of God. As we begin our Lenten observance this year, we would do well to fix our eyes on Jesus, to enter with him into the spirit of those 40 days in preparation for the celebration of the Easter mysteries.

At the close of the 40 days, Jesus moves from the wilderness to Galilee. From that point forward, it seems that he is nearly always surrounded by people. Crowds gather around him. Whole groups follow him. They press in on him. We might say that people were always “invading his personal space.” We also know from the gospels that Jesus took time for himself, time away from the throngs, in order to pray. But the gospels most often portray Jesus together with others.

Those 40 days in the wilderness were devoted to praying, fasting, and undergoing the harshest kinds of temptation. But the 40 days can also be understood as a period of intense preparation, a time for Jesus to make room in himself for all those he would meet in the course of his public ministry—for all those who would draw near to him, come to him, plead with him, ask him for mercy and healing and help.

Our Lenten practices, whatever they may be, are much more than pious devotions. Whether our practice takes the form of “giving up” dessert during Lent, redoubling our efforts at prayer, increasing our contribution to help those in need, fasting, or abstaining from meat, they are all to be understood as a Spirit-assisted effort to empty ourselves of all that would stand in the way of being filled to overflowing with the light and life and love of God. Do we really have room enough for God?

So many of us live amid so much clutter, so much noise. We travel through life at breakneck speed. Lent is the time to empty ourselves not only of the seemingly never-ending stuff, sound, and speed in our lives, but also of our pettiness, our prejudice, our anxiety, our fear. It is an opportunity to make room, not only for God, but for those who come our way. How open is our door to those who come to us? Is there room

enough in our hearts and our homes for those in need?

To take up our Lenten practice this year in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we face a unique challenge in this call to make room for God. In recent months and in different parts of the world, we have seen the escalation of strong sentiments against immigrants. These sentiments appear to be mounting in our own country as well. How might our various Lenten practices—such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, our effort to empty ourselves so as to make room for God—relate to the complex reality of immigration, especially in the face of increasing hostility toward immigrants? Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), is helpful to us here. Writing on love as the heart of the Christian faith, our Holy Father says:

... if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be devout and to perform my “religious duties,” then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely “proper” but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. ... Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. ... No longer is it a question, then, of a “commandment” imposed from without calling for the impossible, but ... a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. (Deus Caritas Est, no. 18)

To the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus’ answer is clear. As his disciples, we are called to attend to the last, littlest, lowest, and least in society and in the church. This Lenten season, join me in committing our Lenten practices to making room for the stranger in our midst, praying for the courage and strength to offer our spiritual and pastoral ministry to all who come to us, and offering our prayer and support for the ones in our midst who, like Jesus, have no place to rest their heads (Matthew 8:20).

To see this sermon online, visit
<http://www.archdiocese.la/news/story.php?newsid=720>.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

SAMPLE SERMONS

“Who Is My Neighbor?”

by Rev. Steve Yamaguchi

Executive Presbyter, Los Ranchos Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Last week I met a woman who shared with me her own childhood story about being a neighbor. As we were making plans for her husband's funeral, this Japanese-American woman told me this story about what had happened in the days following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. She said, “We were neighbors before the war, before that day. I was just the kid next door. I played and went to school with my friends. But after the day in the spring of 1942 when the army posted the signs in our neighborhood, my family had 48 hours to pack up and move out on stake-bed trucks. My father was a fisherman and out at sea so federal agents picked him up at the dock. He was a suspect just because he had a boat. He never came home that night. We didn't see him for 11 months. It was scary.”

Born a U.S. citizen, she was a neighbor one day, an alien the next. I officiated at her husband's funeral on Friday. He received a flag. He had fought for his country—the U.S.—in World War II in Italy and Germany, while his siblings, also U.S. citizens, were imprisoned as suspect aliens in a concentration camp in Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

Who is my neighbor? The deep scarring effects of President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 still impact my ministry today—59 years after the fact. When President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, he set in motion one of the great tragedies of 20th century U.S. history, but tragedies befall us all. Tragedies and injustices are no surprise to a biblical people. The infection of the Fall reaches to the farthest edge of our humanity. Lines are drawn, divisions are cast, and aliens we become—alien to one another, as the fall makes us alien to God. And so neighbors become aliens.

It really wasn't a stroke of the president's pen on Feb. 19 that set neighbor against neighbor in 1942. The West Coast had suffered years of anti-Chinese, anti-Asian propaganda in the newspapers of the Hearst media empire. Anti-Asian prejudice became legalized in legislation prohibiting naturalization; and by 1924, the Asian Exclusion Act prohibited any further immigration at all. What culminated in a wartime incarceration was a horrific and devastating tragedy. These U.S. families were torn apart. These U.S. citizens died. Spirits were crushed, and some have never recovered.

In 1942, out West, one man stood boldly for the Japanese. Colorado's Governor Ralph Carr defied the

spirit of the day with all of its fear, ignorance, and dishonest scapegoating. He welcomed Japanese-Americans to his state. He took a stand that allowed my father to leave his concentration camp in Gila River, Arizona, to attend the University of Denver. After the war, Ralph Carr lost his re-election effort. It was the end of his political career, but today he is memorialized in Colorado by the Japanese-American community.

Who is my neighbor? Loving the alien is a clear calling for the follower of Christ. In Paul's list of marks of the true Christian in Romans chapter 12, we are told in verse 12 to “extend hospitality to strangers.” What we translate as hospitality here is Paul's use of a Greek word *philoxenia*, which is literally the love of aliens. In English we have the word xenophobia—the fear of aliens—but we don't have the word xenophilia, which might mean the love of aliens. Hospitality is more than tea and crackers. Paul's list of marks of the true Christian opens with the easily recognized *philadelphia* in verse 10. Paul instructs the listener to practice brotherly love—*philadelphia*—which all the more sets up the listener for the closing of that list where *philoxenia*—alien love—in verse 12 leaps off the page. It screams out at me: Love the ALIEN! THIS is Christian hospitality. THIS is what a good neighbor does. LOVE THE ALIEN.

Who is my neighbor today? My neighbor, the alien, is among us today—and I miss her in my blind spots. Would-be neighbors in need go untouched. Opportunities for deep, profound friendship and reconciliation pass us by. Theological aliens sit in churches on opposite sides of the streets. Cultural aliens live next door in our neighborhoods. International students—the brightest and best in their homeland—are aliens here and sometimes bewildered and lonely. The worker in the cubicle near mine who always eats lunch alone is a neighbor who may be aching for friendship. How do I recognize my neighbor in need? How can I be a good neighbor? How do we recognize the alien in our midst?

Let us pray: Holy God, open our eyes to the stranger before us. Help us to see our neighbor. Help us to be the good neighbor lest we pass you by when you are hungry, thirsty, or lonely, and so miss a time of sweet fellowship with you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

For the entire sermon, visit www.day1.net/index.php5?view=transcripts&tid=167.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

“Compassion”

by Noel Castellanos

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

Regardless of our political persuasion, at the very least we as believers ought to be loving, merciful, and compassionate toward those who are taking care of our kids, mowing our lawns, dry-walling our new homes, picking our crops, serving our meals, fighting for our country in Iraq, and even worshipping in our churches. At the very least, we should understand the agony that many of these parents feel, willing to do whatever they can—even if it means risking their lives—to find a better life for their families and children. At the very least, our hearts should break when we hear about children being torn from their fathers and mothers by immigration raids that are, at best, a cold-hearted attempt to “fix” broken immigration laws. At the very least, those of us who really don’t understand the issues related to immigration reform should take the time to get informed.

I know it feels overwhelming to get involved (I feel over my head in this every day). But, if the Lord nudges your heart to respond—as mine has been nudged—and you do something to get involved out of obedience to Christ, then we will be amazed at what God can do to move hearts and to change laws. Nothing is too difficult for God.

For more resources from Christian Community Development Corporation, visit www.cdda.org.

“Hospitality”

by Rev. Dr. Kathlyn James

SENIOR PASTOR, FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH,
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Text: Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:35

Hospitality to strangers is one of the grand themes of the Bible. When the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness, God provides them with manna and water, as a gracious host. When the refugees finally enter the Promised Land and settle down, hospitality is written into their holy law: “Love the sojourner,” says the book of Deuteronomy, “for you yourselves were once sojourners in the land of Egypt.”

The theme continues in the New Testament when Jesus teaches that acts of hospitality are actually the prime indicator of a person’s relationship with God: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and



you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” The Book of Hebrews reiterates his teaching, referring all the way back to the Genesis story of Abraham and Sarah. “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,” it says, “for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.”

Clearly, willingness to extend hospitality to strangers is fundamental to the Christian way of life. And it may be that today, in our shrinking global village of limited natural resources, the practice of hospitality to strangers may, again, be a matter of human survival. But what exactly is hospitality?

Hospitality involves the obvious: offering food, drink, and shelter to the stranger in need. In the Bible, however, hospitality is a much richer, larger concept. Hospitality is an attitude, a disposition of the heart, out of which such generous actions naturally flow.

Hospitality is a habit of the heart that must be cultivated. This requires, first of all, that we overcome our initial human response of hostility toward people who are strange to us. The Latin root of our English word, “hostility,” is *hostis*, which means “enemy.” Our Christian task is to turn the stranger who is perceived as an enemy—a *hostis*—into a *hospes*, which is the Latin word for “guest.” This is where our English word “hospitality” comes from.

But hospitality requires more than the cessation of hostility toward strangers. Hospitality also requires letting go of one-dimensional concepts of people we don’t know. Have you ever noticed how often someone will say, about someone, “Oh, he is an alcoholic,” or “she’s a divorcee,” as if that one thing said all there is to know about that person. As if that’s all there is to them. As if this stranger were not a multi-faceted human being with a complex history, just as we know ourselves to be.

For the entire sermon, visit www.day1.net/index.php5?view=transcripts&tid=384.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

“Justice and Family”

by Rev. Derrick Harkins

SENIOR PASTOR, NINETEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Text: Micah 6:8

The Hebrew prophet Micah declared that God’s expectation of the faithful is to “do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” We take, in part, from that mandate the understanding of bringing both justice and compassion to circumstances of human need. And also we understand the need to soberly, humbly, and prayerfully consider the response from the church to this [immigration] crisis in order that far more light than heat is added to the present dialogue and subsequent solutions.

I come to you today with a pastor’s heart, and with the deeply held concern that any laws enacted consider the very American tradition of compassion. The heart of what we teach, preach, and live is anchored in the good news, Christ’s saving and liberating love and compassion that has not built walls, but “broken every barrier down.”

Family, in its strongest and most stable structure, is an essential pillar of our society. Within the church the institution of family is supported, encouraged, and applauded. In my own congregation, I see again and again—and am truly thankful for—the examples of family strength and values in the homes and lives of those who have immigrated to the United States.

It is within the structure of families that immigration reform can wield the most enduring benefits. Through a process of restitution, integration into the larger community, and a pathway to earned citizenship, we will do away with a system that has kept millions of hard-working individuals who wish to become productive, law-abiding members of our society in the shadows, and has prevented numerous families from being fully intact and stable (two conditions that benefit society).

For the entire article, visit <http://blog.beliefnet.com/godspolitics/2007/05/rev-derrick-harkins-immigration-and.html>.

“Finding Jesus”

by Kit Danley

PRESIDENT, NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRIES, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Text: Matthew 25:31-46

The second story that Jesus told seems to harken back to the ways in which God uses our treatment of the poor as a barometer to determine how his people were responding to his love and demonstrating the quality of their relationship with him. Were they acting out of his heartbeat for those around them? Were they being transformed into the image of his son? Or were they just being religious and missing the very heart of God, not really understanding his heart or his ways, not knowing him or recognizing him in the guise of their neighbor?

A prominent theme is that, in serving the outsiders of society, we encounter Jesus. Because Christ identified with the stranger, we are to extend the same treatment to the alien and stranger that we would extend toward Jesus.

The Greek word from which we translate “stranger” in this passage, often translated also “foreigner” or “alien,” is *xenos* (from which we derive the word “xenophobia”).

We also ought to define the word “hospitality.” The Greek word for hospitality is *philo-xenos*, which mean “lovers of strangers.” It has the same root as the word *Philadelphia*, which means “brotherly love.” Biblical hospitality involves an encounter with God. We remember particularly the story of Abraham. As we reflect on biblical hospitality, we note that our response to strangers demonstrates our love for God and is a sign of our faithfulness to God.

John Koenig in *New Testament Hospitality* tells us that “rather than burdening or threatening us, the stranger comes to teach the deeper lessons of life and to enable ministry.” What is the message that they bring? Is it a confirmation of a promise? Is it to bless us? Is it to challenge our perceptions? Or is it a call for us to intercede about a certain situation? In this sense all strangers have the potential to become God’s angels, or messengers, to us! We send missionaries throughout the world preaching the gospel and telling all that “whosoever will, may come.” If we refuse to obey the mandate of God to welcome the alien who has come to us, we negate the very essence of the gospel. One thing we know for sure, and that is that the church has prayed for the nations, for chances to evangelize and disciple them. Today, that prayer is being answered as in all of our backyards—the nations have come.

For more resources from Neighborhood Ministries, visit www.nmaz.net/info/resources.htm.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

“The Higher Calling”

by Dr. M. Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas)

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT, DENVER SEMINARY

Text: Romans 12; 13:1-7

The United States prides itself in being a country of laws. There is the settled conviction that here citizens obey the laws of the land and that those who do not are duly punished according to the nature of the violation. Christians who oppose the presence of undocumented immigrants turn to Romans 13 to emphasize that these people are breaking local and national laws and that the appropriate penalties should be applied. This passage is a quandary, too, for some of those who are more sympathetic to the plight of immigrants. They are torn between the harshness and contradictions of the laws and this biblical mandate to submit to the authorities.

Several observations can help put this passage into proper perspective. To begin with, Christians must recognize that their agenda is set in the previous chapter of Paul's letter. Chapter 12 exhorts believers not to be molded by the “pattern of this world” (12:2). Their lives should be characterized by service to others, love, and compassion—even toward enemies (12:3-21).

The authorities, however, have a different purpose and a different way of doing things. This is spelled out in Romans 13. Christians are called to respect the government, says the apostle, but this does not mean sanctifying everything that it might legislate or do. Citizens of the U.S. have the right to disagree with the government, and, motivated by their principles, Christians do this in multiple ways: at the ballot box; through publications; by organizing educational, legal, and civic organizations that defend other points of view; by participating in peaceful protests of many kinds for a host of causes; and the like. Each of these actions in its own way expresses reservations about the state of affairs and the things that the government is mandating. Immigration is an example of an area where many believers diverge from the goals and enforcement of current legislation.

What is more, the U.S. government itself admits

that legislation on immigration must be changed. Leaders from across the political spectrum recognize that what is in place now is not working. Recent efforts to craft a comprehensive immigration policy are clear evidence of the need for new immigration laws.

Therefore, to point to Romans 13 and adherence to the law in debates on immigration, without nuance or biblical and historical depth, simply will not do. Christians should search all of the scriptures for guidance in evaluating the development of immigration policy and engaging its challenges. From that foundation, Christians can begin to move forward to the legal issues. In other words, discussion on legality cannot be limited just to questions about complying with current laws, laws that all know are impractical and will soon

be replaced. If these laws are problematic—theologically, humanely, and pragmatically—and if all sides agree that reform is needful, the call to submit to the authorities in Romans 13 should be rethought in fresh and constructive ways. Respect for the nation's present laws can be coupled with and informed by the move toward a new set of laws. Ideally, laws should embody the best moral principles of a nation. Clearly, immigration legislation does not measure up.

But what of immigrants who are Christians? How do they respond to Romans 13? They know that they are violating the

law by living and working here. But they also have experienced personally the law's inequities. For example, the government turns a blind eye to many employers because the country needs cheap labor, but then it makes access to social services increasingly difficult for these same workers. Hispanic immigrant believers admire the efficiency of the legal system of the United States and want to contribute to society, even as they work for a better life. Many do their best to obey the laws in every area that does not threaten their jobs, homes, and children's education and welfare. Many desire to be model “citizens” as part of their Christian duty and in order to gain the respect of the majority culture in which they live. All fervently want a fair legal resolution of the situation.

Where can we go from here? If one evaluates immigration law in the U.S. as confused and unfair, and if one believes that these laws do not square with



SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

the teaching of the Bible and the ethical demands of the heart of God, let alone the historic openness of this country to foreigners, then these Christians will not say "What is it about 'illegal' that you don't understand?" Instead, they might declare with the apostles: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19).

Before this statement raises all kinds of alarm, let me make it very clear that I am not advocating civil disobedience on a large scale, just as most Christians who have strong misgivings about undocumented immigrants are not lobbying for a massive

national deportation operation to rid the country of one and all. It is a narrow understanding of the nature of law and the Christian's relationship to human government that must be questioned. We need to move ahead towards constructive change with Christian humility and charity, with respect for those placed in authority over us but especially with an eye to the higher calling of the people of God to be a blessing to the world.

Adapted from a new book by Dr. Carroll Rodas, Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible (Baker Academic Books).

BIBLICAL STORIES OF IMMIGRATION

"The Ethics of Hospitality in a World of Nation-States"

by Dana W. Wilbanks

Viewed from a Christian perspective, migrants are not perceived simply as burdens or benefits. They are persons created in the image of God, loved by God, and related to us in the inclusive community of God's reconciling grace. Narrative ethicists have helped to remind us that Christian ethics is communicated in the story(ies) of the Christian tradition, principally the biblical tradition. While we understandably pull out principles and doctrines from these accounts, it is above all in the narrative itself that Christians gain an understanding of God and Christian moral responsibility. And it is this narrative ethic that Christians today should continue to live out in their witness to society.

In Christian thinking about migrants the biblical stories and images about sojourners and strangers are often lifted up. Indeed it is difficult to deny the force of exhortations about welcoming and loving the stranger. But *what is the force of these stories today?* Are they commandments? Analogies? Ideals? I suggest below that they provide dynamic ways to perceive migrants along with appropriate moral responses. In summary, the place to begin our ethical reflections on migration policy is with the concrete encounter of migrants and residents. How we perceive migrants and our relationship with them will largely shape our response to this encounter.

Abraham

Text: Genesis 12:2-3

The narratives of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament convey varied tales of migration, relationships with "others," and moral responsibility. Abram's trek from Haran to Canaan was an act of response to God's promise (Genesis 12:1-9). Yet, some years later, Abram and Sarai were forced to travel to Egypt because of a severe famine in Canaan (Genesis 12: 10-12). In the first passage migration is an opportunity; in the second it is a necessity. Both convey continuing realities of migration. Although Abram's behavior toward Sarai in Egypt is morally repugnant, it reflects the pressures migrants face to accommodate to the power of rulers in order to survive, and the fact that women often suffer most grievously from such vulnerability.

Migration stories also include pictures of hospitality. As we read in Genesis 18:1-16, Abraham is now the host rather than the refugee. The text provides a full account of the hospitality toward strangers that God expects. It involves both gestures (such as bowing) and the best provision Abraham can offer. He remains with the visitors while they eat, and he even accompanies them for a while "to set them on their way." Although Abraham initially did not know these travelers were messengers from God, the fact always remains a possibility when strangers appear. On this occasion, they bring the startling news that Sarah will have a son. This motif about the surprising identity and wonderful news of strangers is echoed in the book of Hebrews: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

BIBLICAL STORIES OF IMMIGRATION

strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (13:2). In fact, Christ himself may appear in the person of the stranger (Matthew 25:31-46; and the appearance of the risen Christ as a stranger to grieving disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24).

Hebrews in Egypt

Text: Exodus 22

Migration stories further depict the sins of inhospitality. In Genesis 19, Abraham's nephew, Lot, also extends hospitality to visitors. But here the residents of Sodom, instead of offering a welcome, want to do violence to the strangers. This cruel violation of hospitality brought about Yahweh's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, an action so vivid and harsh that it continued throughout the Old Testament to convey the seriousness of God's judgment.

Yet even more central to the story of Israel is the oppression of Hebrews as foreigners in the country of Egypt. Once again, this time the family of Jacob, Hebrews migrated to Egypt to escape the desperate conditions brought about by famine. Providentially, Joseph was in a politically influential position to render assistance. But eventually the Hebrew foreigners were enslaved. According to Patrick Miller, the account takes on the character of an "*anti-sojourn* story, a depiction of inhospitality to strangers." To note analogies with current debates about migration policies is irresistible. The Pharaoh was in a double bind. He was worried about the political threat of an increasing immigrant population. But he also did not

want to lose the cheap labor of the Hebrew slaves. In a utilitarian calculus, which was greater—burden or benefit?

The central event in the history of Israel takes place in this context. Yahweh delivered the oppressed immigrants in the mighty event of the Exodus. Teachings about hospitality to strangers were rooted above all in this experience of oppression and liberation. Sanctuary workers were indeed reappropriating a central theme of their faith narrative when they viewed Central American refugees in light of God's liberating activity in history. "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21). In the Old Testament several different terms refer to strangers or foreigners. The Hebrew words *zar* and *nokri*, translated as "stranger" and "foreign," refer to persons who are not a part of Israel. Specifically, *nokri* refers to "a foreigner who has not entered into any lasting relationship to the land or the people." *Ger*, on the other hand, is translated as "sojourner," "stranger," or "alien," and points to someone who comes from outside the community but who now settles within the community. The *ger* may reside for a short time or long time. This person is the subject of important covenantal obligations in Israel. The *ger*, unlike *zar/nokri*, is one who has established a relational bond with residents. The terms of the relationship are a matter of moral significance. The *ger* is very much like what we today call "resident alien." He or she may be a refugee or an immigrant, settling into the community but still as an outsider who brings a different communal identity.

Excerpted from Re-Creating America by Dana W. Wilbanks. For the entire article, visit http://www.progressivechristian-witness.org/pcw/pdf/Wilbanks_EthicsOfHospitality.pdf



SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

BIBLICAL STORIES OF IMMIGRATION

“Mi Casa Es Tu Casa: A Biblical Perspective on the Current Immigration Issue”

by Dr. Lindy Scott, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois

Jesus: The Immigrant Par Excellence

Text: John 4

The New Testament opens with the genealogy of Jesus. It is no accident that many of his ancestors were foreigners, like Ruth the Moabite, and some of ill repute (like Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute). Although Matthew was the most Jewish of the four evangelists, he frequently denounced the hyper-nationalism of his countrymen (Matthew 4:12-16, 8:5-13, 15:21-28, and 28:16-20).

One of the few episodes of the infancy of Jesus narrated in Scripture portrays Jesus as an international, political refugee. In order to escape the infanticide ordered by King Herod, Jesus was taken by his parents to Egypt (again the country of hospitality). Jesus the Asian was well received in the African continent when his life was in danger. Although many immigrants migrate for economic reasons, some do so under dire circumstances when their lives are at stake. For example, during the 1980s many Central Americans came to the United States to escape the dangers of civil war in their own countries, in part caused by the North American government.

One of the best known conversations that Jesus had took place with a Samaritan woman (John 4). The Samaritans and the Jews did not normally have dealings with each other. Nevertheless, Jesus purposefully led his disciples into Samaria in order to challenge the political and racial barriers that divided the two groups. He affirmed that people from all nations would be received by God if they worshipped him in Spirit and truth. The gospel rapidly expanded throughout the Roman Empire, largely due to great immigration movements. The gospel spread out past Jerusalem due to the persecution that took place there (Acts 8:4ff).

Christians as “Foreigners and Exiles”

Text: 1 Peter 2:9-11

We end this quick overview of New Testament examples of immigration with two references in the general epistles. We recall the words of the Apostle Peter. He recommended Christians to consider themselves as “foreigners and exiles,” that is, as people without a country, but who have become the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-11). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is even more explicit. The “heroes of the faith” recognized that they were “foreigners and strangers on earth” who longed for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a special place for them. If believers in Biblical times placed their earthly possessions in God’s hands and to be shared with their neighbors, we are called to follow their example.

Excerpted from Mi Casa Es Tu Casa: A Biblical Perspective on the Current Immigration Issue, by Dr. Lindy Scott. For the entire article, visit www.wheaton.edu/CACE/resources/onlinearticles/immigration.htm.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

IMMIGRANT STORIES OF TODAY

Eduardo's Story

My name is Eduardo Gonzalez. I am enlisted in the United States Navy and my rank is Petty Officer Second Class, air warfare. I enlisted in the Navy in 2003. I graduated high school in 2001, and then continued my education by earning my associate's degree in occupational studies. I had many choices, but after September 11, 2001, I decided to make this a better country for my family. Since my enlistment, I have been deployed two times: first on June 7, 2004, on board the U.S.S. John F. Kennedy, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The second time was on November 28, 2005, when I was deployed to Camp Beuhring Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am now preparing for my third deployment, to begin this November on board the U.S.S. Harry S. Truman for a tour of the Gulf region. I am proud of my service to this country and have enjoyed every second of my four-year enlistment. In fact, I plan to re-enlist when my current commitment is up.

I met my wife, Mildred Gonzalez, in November 2001. On May 28, 2004, we decided to get married. Mildred's mother had come to the United States from Guatemala in 1989, without documents, when Mildred was only five years old. Mildred's mother applied for asylum/NACARA in September of 2000 and included Mildred on her application. Her mother was eventually granted legal status in July 2004.

Because Mildred was included on her mother's application, Mildred also should have been granted lawful status in July of 2004. However, we were unaware of the repercussions of our decision to get married six weeks earlier—our marriage cancelled out Mildred's ability to obtain status through her mother because she was no longer an unmarried daughter under 21 years old. At the time we got married, we did not know that Mildred and her mother would have an appointment with immigration in July of 2004. After all, they had already been waiting for four years for an appointment at that time.

Mildred attended the immigration appointment with her mother and brother. Mildred was denied her request to obtain legal status, solely due to her change in marital status. At the time of her immigration interview, I was deployed and only being able to communicate once in a while, I found out that she didn't get approved.

Mildred's case was then sent to an immigration court for removal proceedings and her first court

appearance was on September 16, 2004. The judge was generous because of our situation and decided to reset her court date to June 14, 2007. We were all hoping for immigration reform by that time, hoping that the law would change.

However, that did not happen and on June 14, 2007, Mildred and I appeared in court, fully expecting that Mildred was going to have to leave the United States within 120 days, maximum. I was in uniform and the judge, knowing that I was about to deploy and knowing that we have a 20-month-old son, gave Mildred a 12-month extension. We recognize that Mildred has been fortunate to get extensions. These extensions do not solve our problem, but only prolong it. On June 8, 2008, if Mildred's legal status does not change, she will have 60 days to voluntarily depart the United States or she will be deported.

She has not been to Guatemala since she was five years old; she is not familiar with the culture, language, or society. She has no family there and I feel this would be very difficult for us and, perhaps, even dangerous for Mildred. Mildred has spent 18 years of her life in this country, and to us and our child, the United States is her home.

Our son, Eduardo Gonzalez, was born on December 9, 2005, two weeks after I was deployed to Kuwait on my second tour. Missing my first-born child's birth was a sacrifice in itself. Yet, I had to perform my duties as a member of a team of helicopter mechanics. We are in charge of maintaining and repairing a squadron of eight helicopters, whose mission is to transport personnel, cargo, and injured people. I consider my job very crucial in maintaining the Navy's mission readiness and I readily made the sacrifice.

I am about to go on deployment once again, knowing that my wife might not be here when I return, and not knowing where my son might end up if Mildred has to leave before I return. Sometimes I find it difficult to concentrate on my duties. As a citizen of the United States of America, it makes me wonder, "If I can die for my country, then why am I not allowed to just be with my family?" Every time I go somewhere with my squadron, my wife worries about me not coming home one day, but now she also has to worry about leaving a home, a country, where she feels safe.

I want to serve my country 100 percent. But with this issue in the back of my mind, I feel I can't do that. I am not asking for anything, I am just bringing

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

IMMIGRANT STORIES OF TODAY

this issue to your attention. As you may already know, my family is not the only one going through the same situation. Many will not come forward and speak about it because they fear they might have to pay the consequences. Mildred and I also worry that this might have a negative impact on us, but given this opportunity, we feel that if we tell our story we might be helping out others in the same situation. I come before you not only as a United States Navy sailor, but as a husband, a father, and an American citizen.

Claudia's Story

(Phoenix, AZ)

Claudia is a significantly precious member of our faith family. She was a kid in our programs starting around age six. Her mother and her boyfriend brought little Claudia and her baby sister across the border when Claudia was almost five. The poverty and abuse of Mexico was something they were fleeing, only to find more of it here.

Claudia is simply a faithful survivor. She not only had survived years of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather, but single-handedly put him in prison once she discovered he was also molesting her siblings. She has lived every day of her adult life with the very real fear that she could be deported to a country she has never known and in which she has no contacts or means of support for herself or her children.

She is an amazing single mother of three strong and godly children, who has also gotten involved in immigration reform. Today she is found telling her story to many listeners who are eager to put a face on the immigration debate. Claudia just recently was told about the "U" visa for abuse victims and, after she made a successful application for herself and her sister, both were rewarded with a four-year visa, renewable every year. She gives God all the glory and the credit for loving her this much to give her legal status in the only country she has ever known.

Liliana's Story

(Simi Valley, CA)

Liliana has lived in the U.S. for nine years. When her family came legally to the U.S. to be farm-workers in California, Liliana stayed behind to complete high school. After graduating, she was so desperate to rejoin her family that instead of waiting the estimated 8 years for a family member to petition for her legal status (due to the backlog in the family immigration system), she bought a false birth certificate and tried to come to the U.S., but was discovered at the border. Instead, she crossed through the desert and joined her family.

Years later, after she got married and became a mother, Liliana's husband tried to petition for her, only to find out that her use of the false birth certificate incurred an automatic felony charge—falsely claiming to be a U.S. citizen—which carries a lifetime bar to immigration. All three of Liliana's children and her husband are U.S. citizens. Her parents are also permanent residents of the U.S. and her brothers and sisters are all citizens or residents. Liliana and her husband both work and they own their own home, yet Liliana is facing deportation.

Juan's Story

(Los Angeles, CA)

Juan has lived in the U.S. for almost 15 years. During this time, he has raised a family and founded his own gardening business, which provides work for two other people. He also volunteers at both of his children's schools. He has always paid taxes as a business owner and has never had so much as a traffic ticket. His oldest daughter wants to be President of the United States when she grows up.

Juan came to this country from Guatemala in his early twenties, during a time when his country was engulfed in a civil war that put him in grave danger. His father was the victim of a political kidnapping. His mother fled to the U.S. and was granted political asylum. Juan did not want to leave Guatemala and stayed as long as he could hide. Upon arrival, his asylum petition was denied.

Both of Juan's children are U.S. citizens, as is his mother. His mother has petitioned for him to be given legal status; however, because he has a deportation order and his asylum case was denied, his qualification as a family member cannot even be considered.

SERMON RESOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

IMMIGRANT STORIES OF TODAY

Marta's Story

(Phoenix, AZ)

Like many immigrants, Marta came here as a very young child, all of which was out of her control. Her mother was looking for a way to survive her poverty. She has always worked in difficult circumstances, faithfully, washing dishes in a little neighborhood dive that serves police and residents.

Marta found Christ with a neighborhood outreach near us and came into leadership with us in the eighth grade. As an "A" student throughout high school, she always dreamed of college. Marta graduated this past school year and enrolled in college even though Arizona had just passed Proposition 300, making it overwhelmingly difficult for undocumented students to go to college. The law requires these students pay out-of-state tuition, increasing the burden of an already expensive schooling from unmanageable to impossible.

Currently she is in college under a private-money scholarship program provided through a fund set up by the president of our largest university. This fund was found to be helping deserving undocumented stu-

dents, and he has been lambasted in the local press.

Marta has learned to cry out to the Lord, believing he is for her:

Marta's Lament

Lord, where do I begin?

Every day I look at you and ask, why is life picking on me?

Every day another hurdle

Every day another pain

Recently I have come to realize that the pain is there Whereas before I didn't care

I could think about what was about to surface and block it all away

Now I have been told that in order for me to grow I must feel

So every day I feel, and every day I hurt

I ask, why do I deserve this?

My easiest and safest way is just turn my self away

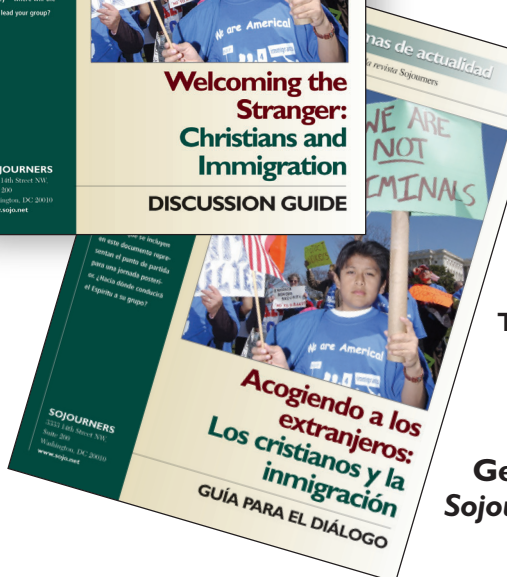
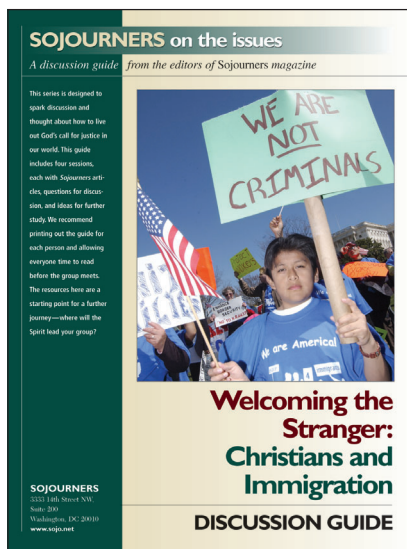
And then I question if I still should be in the presence of your glory

It's as if your love is like a switch

I turn you off, I turn you on—will it ever just be okay?

Will I ever just not hurt, God? Can't we get a break?

Other Immigration Resources Available from Sojourners



Toolkit/Paquete Informativo

• Welcoming the Stranger: An Organizer's Toolkit

• Acogiendo a los Extranjeros:

Paquete Informativo para la educación y la acción cristiana

Discussion Guide/

Guía Para el Diálogo

• Welcoming the Stranger: Christians and Immigration

• Acogiendo a los Extranjeros: Los Cristianos y la Inmigración

To order: www.sojourners.org



Get Sojourners every month. Subscribe to Sojourners magazine. 1-800-714-7474 • www.sojourners.org