

Intro.: Today we conclude our series on hospitality, including 3 Sundays specifically looking at immigration

A. Pastor Cindy last week began introducing us to biblical material relating to immigration, from the Old Testament

1. She walked us through some of the many O.T. migration stories
2. She also summarized for us the various O.T. laws directly pertaining to the compassionate treatment of immigrants and aliens

B. Now today we focus on what the New Testament may say to us pertaining to immigration

1. So after last week from the O.T., let me start with an honest admission, in case you are expecting many rich texts in the N.T.:
2. The fact is that most of the biblical material directly applicable to the subject of immigration is found in the O.T.
 - a) Nearly all of the direct teaching about immigration is there, and most of the biblical migration stories are in the O.T.
 - b) But there is still relevant material on immigration to be found in N.T.
3. It's appropriate that we begin a N.T. inquiry into immigration by looking at the life & teachings of Jesus ...
 - a) Why? Because one of our foremost faith tenets as Anabaptist Christians is what Palmer Becker has summarized: "Jesus is the center of our faith"
 - b) Our Xian faith doesn't start with the book of Revelation or the many Epistles, important as they are. Ours is a Jesus-centered faith. SO ...

II. What do the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus tell us about immigration?

A. Frankly, not very much, at least directly.

1. Like Cindy mentioned last week, biblical scholar & seminary professor Danny Carroll has a helpful book I would recommend to you, called Christians at the Border, which examines immigration, the church & the Bible.
2. When it comes to Jesus & immigration, Carroll helps us understand 2 main points –

B. 1st of all, Jesus knew about life as a refugee. He had first-hand experience!

1. From Matt. 2 we know part of Jesus' childhood was spent as a refugee in Egypt, fleeing to avoid King Herod's deadly anger!
2. We don't know how long the Holy Family stayed in Egypt, but there were Jewish communities in Egypt back then, so they could have found some fellow Jews to settle in with for a while
3. The first point for us to remember is that Jesus personally knew what it is like to be a displaced person in a foreign land.

C. The 2nd main point is that Jesus did not directly teach on the subject of immigrants, but **he was constantly ministering with people who were different ... or were even despised by Jews**

1. It wasn't just foreigners & Gentiles that the pious Jews looked down on and tried to stay away from
 - a) Poor people, diseased people, demon-possessed people, prostitutes, Roman collaborators ... all these were also suspect or even hated
 - b) Yet it is precisely these people that Jesus not only tolerated, but he sought them out!
2. For our understanding of treating outsiders & foreigners, perhaps no stories of Jesus are more important than when he interacted with Samaritans, whom most Jews deemed as heretical half-breeds
 - a) We have Jesus spending time with the Samaritan woman at the well, treating her with dignity and offering her living water (John 4:1-30)
 - b) Most importantly we have a parable of Jesus about being a true neighbor, in which the virtuous hero of the story is not a respected Jewish religious leader, but rather a despised Samaritan! (Luke 10:29-37)

D. So Jesus the child refugee, Jesus the unorthodox rabbi did not teach about immigrants ...but he sure hung out with people considered losers, and he was ridiculously soft on criminals and heretics!

III. Now is there anything else in N.T. relevant to immigration?

A. Last week Cindy advised us that as Christians there are 2 places that we ought not to begin our immigration discussions: *national security/borders ... & legality*

1. Some will say that there are Bible texts that speak to legality ... That's what I want to come back to
2. A few weeks ago Cindy also preached from 1 Peter 2 on the fact that as Christians we are all strangers & aliens

- a) She reminded us that we're citizens of heaven 1st, and we need to hold lightly any earthly citizenship we claim
- b) And yet, because we all hold some sort of earthly citizenship, we struggle with how to simultaneously hold these 2 citizenships ...

3. And so questions of our responsibility as Xians to earthly government are not unrelated to immigration discussions

B. Sadly, however, these questions, often break down into what I consider a very unhelpful question:

1. "What part of 'illegal' don't you understand?"

- a) To start with, the question insults the other person's intelligence
- b) But beyond that, it also assumes that the conversation is over, because legal status becomes the starting and the ending point. After all, so the argument goes, doesn't Romans 13 tell us to obey our government?

2. Well, actually, what the Bible tells us on the legality question is not that simple, but we do need to look at that

C. But just as Prof. Danny Carroll does not have us start with border security or legality, **Cindy called us to start first with the Bible**

1. So let me try to summarize the Bible's message on immigration, separate from the modern question of legality

2. Maybe it would help if I illustrate how Prof. Carroll has summarized the biblical teachings, both OT & NT

- a) Starting from the creation story in Genesis, we affirm that immigrants, like everyone else, are made in the image of God
- b) We add to that the fact that migration is so central in the history of the people of God
- c) Then we pay attention to the OT laws that call for ethics of compassion to be shown to immigrants
- d) Finally, we bring in the New Testament message I mentioned today and which we've been preaching for several weeks, in which Jesus & other NT writers are teaching radical hospitality with the stranger and the person who is "different"
- e) Add that all up and you see a clear inclination in the Bible as a whole toward welcoming immigrants in the name of Christ

3. My friends, THIS should be our default, our biblical starting point before we address questions of legality ... but now that we're there, let's talk about legality in connection with immigration

IV. How shall we as Christians think about lawbreaking in general, and illegal immigration in particular?

A. So after starting with those biblical basics above, Carroll provides 3 cautionary perspectives to remember when we as Christians try to apply Romans 13 to specific laws in our world

B. 1st perspective is a question: "What happens when the law itself is unjust?"

1. It is fundamentally dishonest and naive to tell people to just obey the law and they won't have any problems

a) Last month US border patrol agents took custody of an undocumented 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy in an ambulance, and they kept her in a children's facility after her emergency surgery, rather than returning her to her parents. What those agents did was legal, but was it just?

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/03/562003841/girl-detained-by-border-patrol-after-emergency-surgery-is-released-to-parents>

b) If you want to go back further in history, the ability of the Nazis to round up, torture, and slaughter millions of Jews was all legal under German laws at that time. I assume no one here believes it was just.

c) I am not equating our current laws with those of Nazi Germany, but human laws often fall far short of actually serving the cause of justice

2. So is there any N.T. guidance when human laws conflict with God's desire for humans? Yes, there are 2 that I can name:

a) In Acts chapter 4, the apostles Peter & John were so enthusiastic about preaching the risen Jesus Christ that the guards around the Jerusalem temple had them arrested for creating disturbances among the people

The leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin were very threatened by this Jesus movement, so they ordered Peter & John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus

As uneducated law-abiding Jews, these 2 fishermen should have just obeyed the rulers, packed it up and gone back home to Galilee to talk about Jesus, right?

Instead, their famous reply was, "*Which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:19-20)

b) There is also a story of Jesus himself that sheds light on how we should view earthly laws.

In the passage we heard from Mark chapter 2, some Pharisees criticized Jesus for allowing his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath, which technically was considered working.

- (a) In this story, Matthew, Mark & Luke all have Jesus declaring that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.
- (b) Only in Mark does Jesus also add these crucial words: *"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath."*
- (c) In other words, God did not first create laws, and then create humans to obey them. God created humans, and then created laws to help them live fulfilled lives.
- (d) What Jesus is saying here in Mark 2 is that when a law does not help us achieve such fulfillment, his followers do not have an obligation to obey it

I'm grateful to Father Roger Vermalen Karban, a priest from Belleville IL, for bringing to my attention this connection of immigration with Jesus' view of legality

- (a) Father Karban highlights how Christian leaders over the centuries have focused not on what Jesus says here but focused on Romans 13 and submitting to authorities
- (b) The priest notes that *"forgetting that the apostle penned these words before the start of the empire's widespread persecutions, [this reliance on Romans 13] provided Christians with a moral loophole: Do what the law says and forget about the injustices the law creates."* (<https://sojo.net/articles/mark-s-gospel-provides-legal-loophole-providing-sanctuary-will-christians-use-it>)
- c) I know the distinctions that are being called for here are not easy, and Christians have often disagreed on which laws to disobey when they are not fulfilling God's desires for humanity
- d) But I for one am not prepared, in the name of pure legality, to simply turn a blind eye to all injustices that human laws create.

C. A 2nd perspective about Romans 13 is to read that passage in its larger context

1. That passage of instructions to Christians for relating to government has a larger framework around it.
2. It's part of a bigger contrast between the mindset and actions of Christians compared to the world around them
 - a) In other words, the instructions you find in Romans 13:1-7 must be understood in light of the rest of Paul's instructions to us starting in Romans 12:17 and continuing in ch.13:8-10
 - b) That is why we read as much of Romans as we did today, rather than jumping only to those verses about government
 - c) Listen to these instructions as part of this larger context for Rom. 13:

Practice hospitality.

Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good.

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

3. Did you hear that last one, my friends?

- a) If you really want to understand the legality aspect of immigration from the New Testament teachings and you want to jump to Romans 13, OK. But first start in chapter 12 and then don't stop until you hit verse 10
- b) *Repeat v. 10* ... We are called to something higher than blindly obeying whatever the law of the land is.

D. And speaking of blind obedience, that is basically the 3rd perspective about Romans 13 It calls us to subjection to the government, not blind obedience

1. Too often people read these verses from Romans 13 and believe it counsels us to always obey our government.

- a) The Greek word in verses 1 & 5 is not translated "obey" ... it means to "be subject to" or "submit to"
- b) It means respecting what the government does, along with the very notion of government authority, which God has ordained

But it does not mean blind obedience to anything and everything the government orders

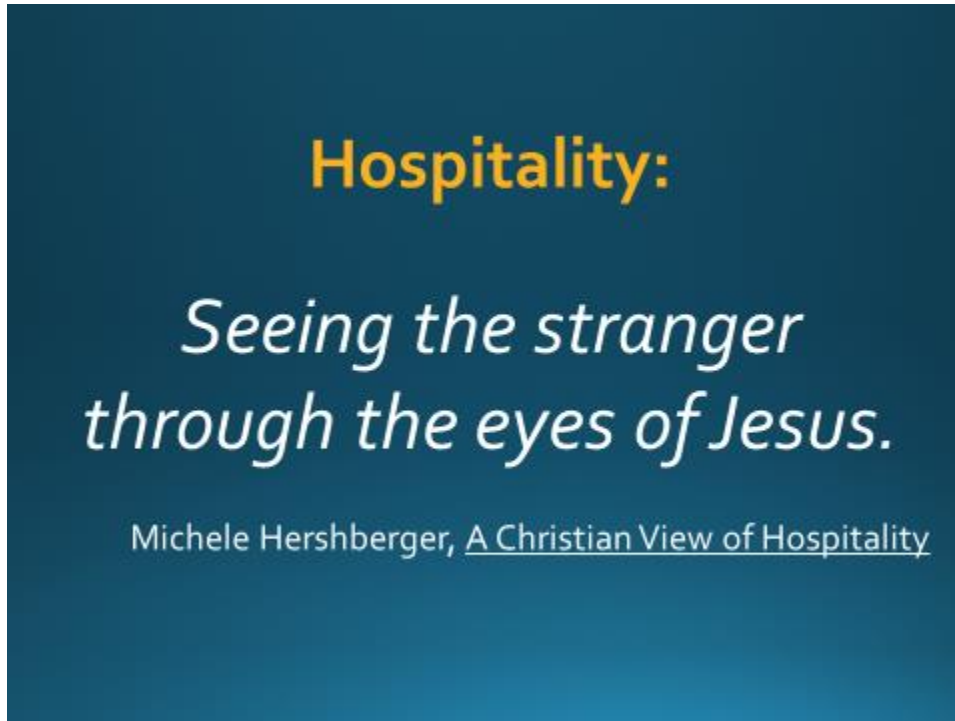
It also does not mean that Christians who follow their consciences and disobey laws for godly reasons, can then expect to get off scot-free from any punishment

2. If we conscientiously and respectfully disobey government, then we also submit to its authority to administer consequences ...

(I'm sorry but don't expect the Bible to bail you out of a speeding ticket that you earned!)

V. Conclusion

A. In this series, we've reviewed many biblical stories and teachings about God's radical view of hospitality



B. But as immigrants all around us continue to be treated in ways that Jesus would never condone, what can we do?

1. 2 weeks ago, you heard from Saulo Padilla a general call to welcome immigrants. In other words, get to know them as persons rather than as categories. In the long term, this is probably the most important thing you can do.
2. Some congregations have declared themselves sanctuary churches, where persons who are in imminent danger of deportation may take up residence to prevent the tearing apart of families.
 - a) An Elkhart-Goshen Sanctuary Coalition is still in early stages of exploring how to support such congregations, but there is not much organized for action now
 - b) There is also discussion about setting up response networks for peaceful rapid mobilization at homes and factories if and when immigration raids happen. This could reduce abuses of power and draw attention to unjust laws
 - c) Waterford's own HOPE Team will be discussing these and other potential ways to support our immigrant neighbors and will invite your participation as appropriate opportunities arise
3. There is 1 very practical action that we can soon take. The Elkhart County HOPE Network is just about to roll out the new Goshen Resident ID card program, which will be a valid form of identification within the city of Goshen, but not valid for driving

- a) This card has been asked for by many Latinos in the local community, to provide identification when banking, entering a school building or with law enforcement
- b) Besides undocumented immigrants, it will also be useful for others, such as those who don't drive, or ex-offenders re-entering the community
- c) When the card comes out, hopefully this month, I encourage all of us living or working in Goshen to go purchase one, even if you already have a valid driver's license.
- d) This is a concrete act of solidarity with our immigrant neighbors, so that the card does not automatically indicate an undocumented status.

C. As we conclude this series, let us remember that biblical hospitality is a strange mingling of the roles of host & guest

1. It is not always the host who has the most to offer. Strangers & guests also bring surprising gifts: the gift of awareness of our own neediness ... the gift of true generosity
2. In the case of immigrants, their gift is reminding us of our own true Christian identity: we too are aliens, strangers in a foreign land
3. Most of all, when we show love to strangers & immigrants we are honoring God's law in the best sense of the word, because Romans 13 tells us love is the fulfillment of the law