

“This Ain’t Science Fiction Folks – We’re All Aliens!”

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Date: May 27, 2018

Scripture:

Leviticus 19:1-34, Ephesians 2:1-20, Matthew 25:34-36

Leviticus 19 :1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy...9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God... 33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with 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.

Ephesians 2:1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient....12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall... 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Matthew 25:34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Sermon:

Residents of our country fall into one of three categories:

1. Original inhabitants or Native Americans who were here long before it was even called America and who have been constantly displaced ever since the arrival of European colonialists.
2. Those who were, and still are, forced to come here through slavery, war, natural disasters and economic destabilization.
3. And finally those who had some choice in the matter and who immigrated here some with and some without documentations.

So, by an overwhelming number, most of us are immigrants. Our families came from somewhere else and arrived speaking different languages and following different customs.

But if we are all immigrants then why do so many of us
treat those who have most recently arrived with such hostility?

Isn't ignorance, fear and scapegoating of these newer immigrants
to despise the deepest part of our personal as well as national story?

Does this not seem like a profound sense of suppression
and a form of deep collective self-contempt!

Maybe this is a result of the many forms of trauma
that those first immigrants experienced in their country of origin?
Maybe it was the trauma from the hostile reception that
nearly all new immigrants faced as they washed up upon our shores?
Was it a survivors guilt on the part of all those who managed get out
fleeing famine and war while leaving so many others behind to die?
Or maybe it was the rightly but unrecognized guilt
of the oppressors who knew very well their own complicity?

And for many of us the arrival of our fore-parents was a long ago.
We are generations and centuries removed from that time
and from their experiences.

We have forgotten and melted in the same pot to the degree
that we have no real ethnic identity to claim and thus celebrate.

Rather than a gumbo of distinct parts (some spicier than others!)
we have melted into an undefined grey glob
of tasteless old porridge we call American.

Perhaps more dangerous is we have acculturated
without critique or little concern to with the majority?
We now feel entitled and similar to the children of Israel,
we to have failed to heed God's warning to:
"keep in mind just where you came from!"
We also suffer from an understanding of current events
that cause so many in our world to be on the move!

Sociologists use the terms; "push" and "pull"
to explain the forces that cause immigration.

Pull factors:

- a. Religious and political freedom
- b. Upward mobility, jobs and education
- c. A better life for our children
- d. "the American dream!" "Anchor babies!"
- e. DC cab drivers

Push Factors:

- a. Wars; religious, political and ideological (Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan)
- b. Low intensity conflicts through out the world (Cold War in Central America and Africa)
- c. Famine both ecological and political
- d. Displacement by international corporate capitalism and marxism.
- e. Climate change!

It seems, however, in our current debates regarding immigration the focus is mostly on the “pull” factors.

We tend to either ignore and/or grossly misunderstand the immense “push” factors that are involved.

Most American’s are especially unaware of our very own nation’s foreign and business policies that are implicitly causative of fomenting this mass forced march of peoples.

Now I love to eat pho and I am proud that with in our very own Mountain States Mennonite Conference we have a Hmong congregation.

But let’s be real, the main reason why so many Vietnamese live in the US, is due to the fact that our country bombed the hell out their country, thus making it really difficult for them stay alive in their own country of origin!

Other recent immigrants had the simple misfortune to live somewhere that was above “our oil” or close to some other natural resource a multi-national corporation needed to exploit.

US farm policies flood Mexico with so much cheap corn that farmers in Mexico simply cannot compete and go broke. So why not cut someone else’s lawn in El Norte and stop break your back for nothing in Oaxaca?!

But can we heal our historical amnesia?
What if we dug through our own history to recall and own the fact that many of us are descended from folks who arrived here, tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free, and perhaps even as wretched refuse of other teeming shores?

Are we afraid that what we might find will disappoint us?
But most likely we will find something,
or some folks who might inspire us?
Inspiration to, if nothing else, a sense of affinity with and compassion for those who still arrive on our shores, “homeless and tempest-tossed.”

Is our occupation here merely a “faint accompli”
or as some declare, a very act of God?

We all have a unique story and I want you to recall
and write down our immigrant story.

Here’s a chance for all of your to thin about your story and respond to the following questions:

- How did your ancestors get here?
- Why did they come?
- What were some of the “push” and/or “pull” factors?
- How much do you really know?
- How will you fill in the missing pieces?

My story:

As a child I remember distinctly two books kept on the book shelf;
One was, “The Descendants of David Martin”
and the other was about the descendants
of some guy with the last name Schellenberger.
No doubt the main reason I found those books so cool
was that I was mentioned, by name, in both!

Both books traced my family of origin, maternal and paternal,
to southern and middle parts of Germany.
Both families had migrated to Pennsylvania,
first the Martins to Lancaster County in the middle of the 1700’s
and the Schellenbergers to the middle of the state sometime during
the ought years (1803 or 04) of the 19th century.

No doubt both families were “pulled” to the new world
by the promise of religious freedom as well as fertile
and abundant farm land that would provide
a better future for their children.
(Did they or their progeny every wonder
why their was so much unoccupied land?)

But there were some things “pushing” them across the ocean as well.
Religious freedom was important especially after hundreds of years
of persecution of Mennonites by state run religions.

Could some of my ancestors have been included with those
who had been sold into slavery, imprisoned, tortured
or even murdered by the state like many other Anabaptists had?

Had some of them been innocent victims of the centuries
of religiously inspired wars in Europe.

Were they also fleeing the grinding poverty, famine, pestilence and hopelessness that war always produce?

And of course many of their descendants do not remember that most did not receive a positive welcome.

Ben Franklin, 1751 said the following about my ancestors:

“Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements and, by herding together, establish their language and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them?”

But, of course that was over 200 years ago, and well time flies and memories do fade...

Now let's take time to share some of your own thoughts and reflections.

- Was this sermon helpful?
- What other ways can we become more compassionate
- to those who come here from some other places?
- How can we best help those, who are already here
- to be more understanding and compassionate?

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