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Proper 9C, 2019
Peace, Seattle
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Luke 10:25-37

# SEEING THE NEIGHBOR

**There are only a handful of characters:**
- the lone traveler, assaulted and left half-dead;
- the religious leaders who pass by him on the other side;
- the Samaritan who goes an extra mile in showing compassion to the man
- the innkeeper who provides space and care for his recovery

Social ministries like Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services trace their DNA back to this parable; and hospitals from Puyallup to Boston, Long Island to L.A. bear its name.

**Of all the stories Jesus told, it may be the most well known, and the point seems crystal clear: Even your enemy—the one you can't stand—is your neighbor; and this is what loving him looks like.**

**But we tend to make things complicated.**
Entrenched issues split black and white ethical stances into finer and finer shades of gray.
And we find ourselves needing to return to the same fundamental question over and over again.

**Standing alongside the lawyer in Luke's story we, too, ask Jesus:**
WHO, REALLY, IS MY NEIGHBOR? HOW FAR, REALLY, SHOULD MY COMPASSION REACH?
- Does it include the guy at work whose political views are opposite mine?
  Or the relative who pushes my buttons in all the wrong ways?
- Does it include the Mexican father who crosses the border looking for work?
  Or the ICE border guard who arrests him?
- **Where do I draw the line?**

**Like the lawyer who came to Jesus, do we seek clarity about who we are required to love so that we can be clear about who we are not required to love?**

**This morning Jesus gives us a narrative that calls us to see compassion not as a check off box but an invitation to radical, risk taking love—even toward those who to us may be the OTHER.**

In her book, The God Who Sees: Immigrants, The Bible, and the Journey to Belong,[1] Karen González looks at pivotal stories of Scripture that speak of migration and the vulnerability that comes with being an outsider.

Stories like Ruth and Naomi; Hagar and Ishmael; Joseph in Egypt; the Holy Family fleeing from violence; the Syrophoenician woman.

In each case, these stories reveal something to us about a God who sees their suffering, who hears their cries, and who helps make a way when there is no way. González then looks that our immigration crisis through that lens.

[1] Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2019.

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I was on the way home three weeks back when I first heard about the inhumane conditions children were experiencing at the Customs and Border facility in Flint, Texas.

**The conditions that Clara Long and other lawyers found there were shocking:** [2]

- Over 300 children were being held in a facility with a capacity for 104.
- They were hungry and filthy and some had not changed clothes or showered in weeks;
- Flu and lice outbreaks were going untreated; diapers unchanged;
- Many were sleeping on cold cement floors, sometimes without mattresses or blankets;
- Toddlers and even babies were being taken care for not by adult caregivers but by older children who shared the same cells.
- Many of these children had been in the facility for weeks, despite the fact that they had parents or relatives in the U.S. eager to reunite with them.[3]

**Warren Binford**, a law professor at Willamette University who interviewed children at Flint and other facilities, shared the following story:

> "Wednesday, we received reports from children of a lice outbreak in one of the cells where there were about 25 children, and what they told us is that six of the children were found to have lice.
>
> And so they were given a lice shampoo (by the guards), and the other children were given two combs and told to share those two combs, two lice combs, and brush their hair with the same combs, which is something you never do with a lice outbreak.
>
> … then…one of the combs was lost, and Border Patrol agents got so mad that they took away the children's blankets and mats. They weren't allowed to sleep on the beds, and they had to sleep on the floor on Wednesday night as punishment for losing the comb.
>
> So you had a whole cell full of kids who had beds and mats at one point, not for everybody but for most of them, who were forced to sleep on the cement."[4]

**The word is out about these children and their ongoing trauma; about how, in spite of U.S. law and international conventions, they are still be separated from parents and family members at the border, reclassified as unaccompanied minors, and put in facilities unfit to hold them.**

**Seeing this suffering has caused many to we plead with God through tears of LAMENT:**[5]

How long, Lord? Will you forget the children forever?
How long will you hide your face from their suffering?
How long must they endure separation from their parents and have sorrow in their hearts?
How long must the cruelty of their captors triumph?
Look at them and answer, Lord my God.
Restore them, heal their traumas, and reunite their families.

We repent for our complicity in their suffering.
We have failed to support policies that care for our neighbors and not just ourselves.
We have failed to elect legislators who will do justice for migrant families.
We have failed to do our part to welcome immigrants in mutuality.
We have failed to see their humanity and trust in your bountiful economy.

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[2] Find her interview on NPR here: https://www.npr.org/2019/06/25/735930659/human-rights-watch-researcher-on-what-she-saw-inside-facility-holding-migrant-ch
[3] See the June 22, 2019 *New Yorker* article by Isaac Chotiner, https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/inside-a-texas-building-where-the-government-is-holding-immigrant-children
[4] Ibid.
[5] From Grieving our broken border by Bekah McNeell in the July 1, 2019 online edition of *Christianity Today.* https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/july-web-only/grieving-our-broken-border-christian-leaders-lucado-lament.html

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> But we trust in your faithful love to transform us; we trust that you hear the cries of migrant children.
> Our hearts rejoice in your salvation because you have been good to us.
> We commit to do justice for the immigrant, to love mercy remembering your mercy to us,
> and to walk with you all of our days.

**WE SEE THEM NOW.** AND SEEING THEM, WE SEE HOW TRULY BROKEN OUR SYSTEM IS.

The challenges on every level are vast. But we can do better.
And it starts with SEEING THEM AS HUMAN BEINGS deserving our compassion.

**And what is compassion? Suffering-with.**

**Did you know that the Bible's word for compassion has the same root as the word for womb?**[6]
To have compassion is to have a womb for someone; to treat that person just like the mother who carried her inside her own body; to remember how loved that child was even before eyes were ever laid upon her.

When we read in the Scriptures: **"God will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love,"**[7] what the writer saying is that when we suffer, God looks upon each one of us as though God were our mother.

Friends, God is shedding tears over her children in detention. And God wants us to share in this compassion—to have the same love and care for these children that we have for our own.

Jesus told a story about one man, a Samaritan, who saw the plight of another human being—a man he would under normal circumstances have nothing to do with—and who reached across the borders of his heart to show compassion when others chose to avert their eyes and walk by.

This world, aching under the power and weight of sin, is grieving and as people of faith, we have always been called to weep with those who weep. But because we are uncomfortable in lament, writes Bekah McNeell, we often look away in times of overwhelming tragedy. We don't want to feel grief over the deaths of migrant children: Carlos and Juan, age 16; Darlyn, age 10; Felipe, age 8; Jakelin, age 7; and Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez, age 2.

> "We are tempted to turn from the hurting, and in some cases, even question whether it's really that bad. Politics, cynicism, and fear pull us away from lament, repentance, and action. As children get moved back and forth from crowded, unsanitary Border Patrol facilities," McNeell asks, "I wonder how long people will keep reading. Will this become another case of 'compassion fatigue'?"[8]

**We are not helpless. We have voices; we have feet; we have pens; we have room.**
And we serve a Lord whose compassion will never falter or fatigue.

This Lord makes it clear that the close of the parable is not the end of the story.
Two more words must be spoken and acted upon:
GO AND DO LIKEWISE. Amen.

[6] Portions of what follows are excerpted from an unpublished resource authored by Frederick Niedner as a resource for the season after Pentecost, Series B.
[7] Lamentations 3:32
[8] Op cit. *Christianity Today.*