

I Was a Stranger and You Invited Me In

Each year I purchase a planning calendar specifically made for Christian pastors and church leaders. This calendar reminds me of all the important Sundays, holidays (Christian and secular), and the scriptures designated by the Revised Common Lectionary for each worship service. This past June was a busy time for Christians according to my calendar. There was The Day of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Father's Day, National Gun Violence Awareness Day, Juneteenth, and one that never gets much attention but perhaps this year it should...World Refugee Day.



Here's a summary of a 2024 report from the United Nations Refugee Agency.

At the end of 2024 there were 123.2 million people globally, who have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order.

Among this group of 123.2 million people there were 42.7 million refugees. In addition there were 73.5 million people displaced within the borders of their own countries and 8.4 million asylum-seekers.

There are also 4.4 million stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment, and freedom of movement.

More than 1 in every 67 people on earth is a displaced person.

Many nations, even predominately Christian countries are becoming more and more reluctant to support immigrants and refugees. Some are restricting refugee entry, deporting immigrants at record numbers, and cutting services to the newly arrived. In many cases anti-immigrant leaders have gained or are gaining power resulting in prejudice and violence towards immigrants and refugees increasing all over the globe.

Yet, at the heart of Christianity is an ancient principle that Jesus taught...

*"For I was hungry and
you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and
you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and
you invited me in,
I needed clothes and
you clothed me.
I was sick and
you looked after me,
I was in prison and
you came to visit me."
-Matthew 25:35-36*

People of faith may, of course, disagree about policies regarding immigration, but Christians cannot avoid Jesus' call for compassion, safety, and welcome for the strangers among us. Immigration has been central to the human story from the beginning and the problems are expected to grow worse in the coming decades. It is incumbent on all Christians to resist the dehumanization and demonization of immigrants and refugees and to never deny the clear teachings of Jesus on how we should welcome and treat the stranger.

