

Compassion for the Traveler: A Christ-like Welcome

****Launching Verse of Scripture****: Leviticus 19:34: "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

****Opening Prayer**** (3 minutes)

Let's take a quiet moment to feel God's presence with us. You might light a candle to show His light in our church today.

Dear God, we come to you today with open hearts and minds, asking for your wisdom and guidance. We pray for understanding and kindness as we think about your call to love the traveler, the stranger, and the immigrant among us. Please remind us, Lord, that your Son, Jesus Christ, also had to travel as a refugee, escaping danger and looking for safety. Help us to feel for those who are on hard journeys, and inspire us to show your endless love and welcome. May our words and actions today show your grace and your kingdom. Amen.

****Sermon Narrative**** (25 minutes)

The Journey of the Other

My dear brothers and sisters, we are here today to think about a very important part of our faith: being kind and caring, especially to those who are often called "the other"—the immigrant, the stranger, the foreigner. In a world that often builds walls, both real and in our minds, our holy books and Jesus's own life tell us to build bridges instead.

Remembering Our Own Journeys

Let's think about what it says in Leviticus: "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." This verse isn't just an old rule; it's a main truth for God's people. The Israelites, after being slaves for many years, knew very well what it felt like to be strangers in a strange land. This shared past, this memory of tough times and being moved from their homes, was supposed to help them feel for others. It was a constant reminder that being kind isn't an option, but a command from God, based on their own story.

We, too, are called to remember our own journeys, times when we felt like outsiders. Whether it was a new town, a new school, or just feeling misunderstood, we've all felt the discomfort of being "the other." This feeling can help us understand the big problems faced by immigrants and refugees. A refugee is someone who has to leave their home country because of danger. A migrant chooses to move, either for a short time or a long time, to a different country. Both of these journeys often involve a lot of difficulty and uncertainty.

Jesus, the Traveler

Maybe the strongest example of this truth is in the life of our Savior himself. Jesus Christ, as a baby, was a refugee. To escape the evil king Herod, Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to Egypt, seeking safety from a ruler who wanted to kill all baby boys. He, the King of Kings, started his life on Earth as an immigrant, a person who had to move, depending on the kindness of strangers in a foreign land. This deep truth should always shape how we see things. If Jesus felt this vulnerable, how can we, his followers, ignore those who are going through similar things today?

Throughout the Bible, we see this idea repeated. Old Testament leaders, like Abram, often moved between different groups and countries. Moses himself escaped to a place called Midian. Ruth, too, was an immigrant, moving before coming back to Bethlehem. Daniel had to move to Babylon. These stories show us that people often have to move and sometimes need to find new homes. They also show that some people fit in, while others keep their unique identity in new places.

The Command to Be Welcoming

Being welcoming to strangers was a valued custom in old times. The book of Genesis reminds us of this holy duty. Also, laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy made sure that help was given to those who needed it: widows, orphans, the poor, and yes, strangers—refugees and migrants. These laws weren't just about charity; they were a constant reminder to the Hebrew people that they, too, were once travelers.

Jesus always spent time with "outsiders" and people who weren't Jewish. He talked with the woman at the well, a Samaritan, in John chapter 4. He used a Samaritan as an example of a good person in the story of the Good Samaritan. He praised the faith of a Roman soldier in Luke chapter 7. In the Good Samaritan story, Jesus directly answers the question, "Who is my neighbor?" So, how do immigrants and refugees count as our neighbors? They count not because of where they came from or their legal papers, but because they are human, made in God's image, just like us.

Our Home in God's Kingdom

The New Testament often says that Christians belong not to any country on Earth, but to God's kingdom. Philippians 3:20 and Hebrews 13:14 tell us that we are citizens of heaven. This idea should make us think about what we care about most. When our government's ideas clash with Christian ideas about immigration, where do our true loyalties lie?

We are called to love all people, because all are made in God's image. The early church reached out beyond Israel, as we see in Acts 8:26-39 and Acts 10:34-35. Paul's letters often talk about breaking down the wall between Gentiles and Jews, saying that in Christ, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, but all are one.

Call to Action (3 minutes)

So, how do we put this understanding into practice? How do we show people Jesus in this situation?

* ****Learn****: Understand the difference between refugees, who are forced to leave their homes because of danger, and migrants, who choose to move. Learn the facts and question your own ideas.

* ****Be Welcoming****: Look for chances to welcome strangers in our communities, whether through official programs or simple acts of kindness. A kind word, a helping hand, an open heart can make a huge difference.

* ****Stand for What's Right****: Try to understand the rules and systems that affect immigrants and refugees. Use your voice to ask for fair and kind ways of dealing with things, remembering that our main loyalty is to God's kingdom and its values of love and fairness.

* ****Think and Pray****: As Rector McGurk reminds us, "To vote is an opportunity to release God's will—which is Sacrificial Love—into our struggling world." Listen carefully and pray, letting God guide your heart.

Call to Follow Jesus (3 minutes)

Following Jesus means living a life that looks like His. The journey of the Wise Men, though hard and unsure, led them to the King of Kings, and what they found changed everything. They went home with a new understanding, no longer comfortable with the old ways. We, too, are called to let our meetings with those who are hurting, our embrace of the outsider, change us. We are called to bring hope when there is suffering.

The light of Christ, which is the light of hope, bravery, strength, grace, and kindness, lives deep inside each of us. Let this inner light guide us as we show love to the stranger, the foreigner, and the immigrant, seeing Jesus in every one.

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the lessons of kindness and love shown through your Word and in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray for all immigrants and refugees, for their safety, their welcome, and their well-being. Give us the courage to see them as you see them, as your beloved children, made in your image. Make us stronger in our desire to be agents of your love and welcome in a world that needs it so much. May we always remember that we are all human and your call to love our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.

****Benediction****

Go out into the world, remembering that our God is love. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever. Amen.