

“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me”

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: As we come together now, let us settle into stillness. [Pause]

Let your cares and your weariness wash away. [Pause]

Enter deeply into silence. [Pause]

Today we remember how the Holy Family walked this earth as refugees—as migrants. As they followed the Roman decree—as they fled across the border to escape Herod’s law of the land, they walked as strangers. Just as Mary and Joseph journeyed from one region to another to protect their infant Son, God’s people of yesterday and today continue to journey across the landscape of our world in search of refuge, stability, and a better life. How does God want us to treat the strangers among us?



Optional Reading: [2 Readers will be needed—preferably female and male] “*They Tried to Stop Her at the Border*” (Adapted from *Untie the Strong Woman* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, PhD)

[Pause for a moment of silence]

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Reader I: “You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)

Reader II: “The foreigner who lives among you must be treated like one of your own. Love them as you love yourself, for you too were a foreigner in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:34)

Reader I: “You must love the Most High God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)

Reader II: “Love never wrongs anyone—hence love is the fulfillment of the Law.” (Romans 13:10)

Reader I: “Continue to love your sisters and brothers. Don’t neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13: 1)

Reader II: “I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me. The truth is, every time you did this for the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25: 35, 40)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Think of a time when you felt unwelcome—perhaps looked down upon because of your race, religion, or beliefs. Were you dishonored or bullied because of your appearance or of the way you spoke? How did you feel? Did you feel rejected? Did you fear that your life was in danger? Did anyone take notice of your anguish? [Pause]



PRAYER SERVICE

- Think of a time when you might have not welcomed another: Is it an expected mother from Mexico who makes her home on the streets? Is it a man from Cameroon who sits next to you on the bus who reeks of alcohol and perspiration? Could it be the young boy from Eritrea with little understanding of the English language who was placed in your son's class? Or might it be a Salvadoran activist who like John the Baptist is unafraid to challenge the treatment of immigrants in the United States? What is it about this person that keeps you from welcoming the stranger in your midst?

[Shared Reflection]

PRAYER

ALL: You are Jesus in our midst.

LEFT: You are the God who bears the brunt of the question: "Why didn't you stay where you belong?"

ALL: You are God in our midst.

RIGHT: You feel the red-faced embarrassment when we hear: "Keep your distance, you foreigner, with your different-colored skin and your strange-sounding speech, with your culture and food that are inferior to my own."

ALL: You are God in our midst.

LEFT: You are the God who sits alongside of us, who works in sweatshops and factories with bloodshot-eyes and aching fingers, squinting under the soul-less glare of florescent light.

ALL: You are God in our midst.

RIGHT: You are the God who rises early in the morning with us to harvest vegetables and fruits picked with fingers stained by the pesticides and fungicides that penetrate our skin.

ALL: You are God in our midst.

LEFT: You are the God who stands with us in the chill of the morning in the parking lot of Home Depot, with anxious stomachs hoping that we too will be picked to work just for that day—and actually get paid at the end of the day.

ALL: You are God in our midst.

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, friend of the Stranger,
Inspire us to be ministers of the Gospel
and to see our neighbors in the strangers we meet.
Teach us what it means to love the stranger as we love ourselves.
Forgive us for our selfishness, for our silence when we witness someone being mistreated.
Forgive us for not caring enough for the strangers who come to our communities.
Teach us to love and care for the stranger the way you do. Amen



Faith in Action

You may be wondering: What can I do? How can I welcome or be hospitable to the strangers in my community and church? We need to build bridges to welcome the strangers in our churches, communities, and country. Here are a few suggestions:

Be a Bridge Builder in Your Home and Schools

Interact with immigrants and invite them to your home. Your family and neighbors will see your interaction with strangers as a model and may feel more comfortable around strangers as a result. Offer to teach English and life skills to immigrants. Consider teaching Adult Basic Education Assist or English as a Second Language to adults, as well as students.

Be a Bridge Builder in Your Church

Get to know the immigrants in your community. Attend a church service where members are newer immigrants, and also invite them to your church. Volunteer at a local organization that serves the strangers or immigrants in your town or city. Listen to and empathize with their stories.

Be a Bridge Builder in Your Community

Educate yourself about the laws and issues that negatively impact immigrants in our country. There is a lot of misinformation in the news media. Become aware and search for answers rather than assuming that what you hear in the media is correct.

Be a Bridge Builder in Your Country

Advocate on behalf of the stranger by writing or calling your political representatives to voice your support for immigration reform. There are many laws that affect immigrants negatively and should be changed.

