

No Longer Strangers: We Are Kin
 Leviticus 19:18; 33-34 Matthew 25:35-40
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Leviticus 19:18; 33-34 Inclusive Bible

Never seek revenge or hold a grudge toward your relatives. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am YHWH. Do not mistreat the foreigners who reside in your land. 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 YHWH.

Matt 25:35-40 Inclusive Bible

Come you blessed of my Abba God! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world! 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, 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.** Then the just will ask, **'When did we see you hungry and give you food, or thirsty and give you something to drink? And when did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and give you clothing? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'** **And the ruler will answer them, 'the truth is, every time you did this for the least of my sisters or brothers, you did it for me.**
 The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

I know there is danger in selectively picking texts to prove a point or to address a theme. Yet I have chosen to use these two texts as supporting scripture to address our church's value of welcoming the foreigner and the stranger. I also recognize the danger of using two complex texts and only having about 15 minutes to unpack them. But fools rush in where angels dare to tread.

The scripture found in Leviticus is part of the Holiness Code in the Hebrew Bible. The **purpose of the Holiness Code was to instruct God's people on how to live holy** because the God they served was holy. God **commanded God's people to be as** forgiving, as embracing, as fair, and as justice minded as God. Before this code was written, God promised Abraham that his people would be a blessing to the nations. Israel would be a blessing to people all over the world, not just a blessing to one another in the family. The influence and generosity of those who followed YHWH would

be great. So, these laws were given so that those who followed the Holy of Holies/ YHWH/ the Great I AM, would be instruments or vessels **of God's grace**.

Living the holiness code was not optional. It was the law. **Caring for ones'** neighbors, and foreigners, and strangers was mandatory. When a field was harvested, the owner of the field had a mandate to leave some produce unharvested for those who were foreigners and owned no land and had no field to harvest. Those without means were invited in for a second harvest so they could gather grain and produce to support their own families and live with dignity. The grace extended to others was measured by the Golden Rule, to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Lev. 19:18. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself *and* the foreigner among you must be treated as one of your own.

We are to treat foreigners and strangers as we would like to be treated. How do we want to be treated? --With respect, compassion, dignity, and to be shown hospitality. Building a **40' wall along the southern** border to keep brown skinned foreigners out of this country is not showing compassion, dignity, or hospitality. Deporting Dreamers who have done nothing wrong and have lived in this country all their lives, is not showing compassion or common sense. Banning visas to people from certain countries because of their faith tradition is not the way we as Americans would want to be treated. Harassing our Muslim neighbors and protesting mosques from being built in our neighborhoods goes against the mandate to love your neighbor as yourself. **I'm just sayin'!**

Surely, evangelical Christians who swear they know what the book says, and who say they follow the whole bible, would know these scriptures and the command to care for foreigners, immigrants, and strangers. Surely, they must know that Hebrew 13:2 in the Christian scriptures says, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Caring for foreigners and

strangers is in the code. It is in the law, it is not optional. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself and treat the foreigner as you would treat one of your own.

Now, I will admit that some of us do not treat ourselves very well. So that could be part of the problem. Say amen for your neighbor. Our self-esteem and our self-care could use some sprucing up. We are still eating too much and exercising too little. Some of our calendars are over extended and we have neglected the very ones we love the most. This is breast cancer awareness month and some of us are way over due for a **mammogram and others haven't had a physical in years**. Others of us spend all the money we earn. We are dying to order the iPhone 10 that cost \$1,000 yet we are woefully behind in our tithing, personal savings, and our retirement planning. So, we could do a bit better in caring for ourselves, and that in turn would motivate us to better care for others.

In Hebrew Scriptures, the theology of hospitality grew out of **God's saving grace when God's people were foreigners in Egypt**. They were strangers in a strange land and God saved them. Their rulers made life hell for Israel while they were in Egypt. They survived but it was rough. They were treated like slaves and expected to make brick without straw scripture says. But, God showed up, showed compassion upon them, and delivered them from their oppressors. So, they in turn were to show compassion toward others.

God has saved us too—sometimes from ourselves, or from abusive relationships, or from addictions, or homelessness and some from various illnesses. There are a few skeletons in some of **our closets**. **Yet God's grace is sufficient and God's power is made perfect in our weakness**. We look pretty good right now, but back in the day, some of us were a mess. Yet, since God had mercy on us, showed us compassion, **and welcomed us before God's presence, we ought to go and do likewise. Amen.**

Some might say well this Levitical Code was way before Jesus came and ushered in a new way of living. Jesus showed us how to live in community and we are no longer bound by law, we are bound by grace. That is very true. So, what did Jesus have to say about caring for our neighbors and the foreigner?

Jesus told the parable of the *Judgement of the Nations* to communicate the Golden Rule. Jesus said, at an appointed time the Promised One/ Ruler will come to judge the nations. The nations will be separated based on how they cared for those in greatest need. Those who cared for the vulnerable and marginalized will be rewarded. Those **who couldn't be bothered to care for the lost, the left out**, the locked up, the lonely, the least of these would be punished. The parable leads us to believe that the nations that **were rewarded were taken aback because their reward was unexpected. They couldn't** recall when they had cared for or about the Promised One/ Ruler. So, they asked the Ruler when did we see you in need and take care of you?

The nations judged most worthy and reflecting **God's heart were the ones who fed the** hungry, who gave drink to the thirsty, those who welcomed in the stranger, gave clothing to those who needed protection, and they visited the sick and those in prison. For as much as we meet the needs of the least of these around us, we show grace, and mercy, and compassion, and dignity to God.

But what does that really mean to SFBC? First, we must welcome those who make their way into this edifice. This gothic building is imposing, so we must treat our visitors as royalty, because we just may be entertaining angels without knowing it. So, we need to acknowledge our visitors, speak with them, and let them know they are always welcome here.

Second, the work of welcoming the stranger continues as we build relationships with those different from us. I frequently hear this congregation wants to be more ethnically

diverse, but is that really true or does it just sound good? Because the work of building diversity is tough. Music may need to change. Worship style may need to change. Building use may look different. Leadership may be different. We need to celebrate the ethnic heritage of our members. For example, this is Latinx Heritage Month. We need to celebrate with our Latina/o friends.

Third, welcoming the stranger means voting for those who share our values, as well as getting outside these walls and building community in places that have not been on our radar in the past like south Seattle, the eastside, and the international district.

Yes, we can build a community that supports immigrants, refugees, the stranger and all our neighbors. And, God will be pleased with our efforts for that is our mandate. We affirm our value this day to welcome the stranger, for in so doing we may entertain angels without even knowing it.

Please stand as you are able and let's sing our closing hymn, All Are Welcome found in your bulletin.