

Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

In today's Gospel Jesus talks about the lost coin and the lost sheep. In both stories there is a diligent search and the joyful find. In both cases, the long, loving reach of God brings the lost to restoration. And in both cases the entire community rejoices.

There are many ways to be lost, and while the tax collectors and sinners in today's story *knew they* were lost and were eager to hear what Jesus was saying, it seems that most of the Pharisees had no idea they could possibly be lost. Today I want to focus on those of us who may have no idea we are lost in how we treat the refugee, the immigrant or the stranger in our midst.

The past two Wednesdays at Bible study, the class focused on several readings from Scripture, both the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament, to see what they had to say about immigrants, strangers and refugees, often referred to as "aliens." Steve Berneking chose at least 43 sections of scripture that address the subject. This morning, while we won't share all 43 sections (we'd be here until next Tuesday), we will share several with you.

Several Bible study members will do the readings. As you listen to these sections of scripture, I hope you will listen for the themes that emerge. You may even want to close your eyes as you listen.

(Readings)

(Steve B) Genesis 12:1-3

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, "***Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.*** ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."^[a]

(Steve B.) Genesis 15:12-16

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹³ Then the LORD^[a] said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be ***aliens in a land that is not theirs***, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; ¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

(Steve B.) Exodus 22:21

²¹ You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for ***you were aliens*** in the land of Egypt.

(George) Exodus 23:9

⁹ You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for ***you were aliens in the land of Egypt.***

(George) Leviticus 19:9-10

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall *leave them for the poor and the alien*: I am the LORD your God.

(George) Leviticus 19:33-34

³³ When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall *love the alien as yourself*, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

(Ralph) Numbers 15:15-16

¹⁵ As for the assembly, there shall be for both you and the resident alien a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the alien shall be alike before the LORD. ¹⁶ *You and the alien who resides with you shall have the same law* and the same ordinance.

(Ralph) Deuteronomy 1:16

¹⁶ I charged your judges at that time: “Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and *judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien*.”

(June) Deuteronomy 10:12-13,17-19

¹² So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God^[a] and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being... ¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. ¹⁹ You shall also *love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*.

(June) Deuteronomy 24:17-18

¹⁷ You shall *not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice*; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

(Dave Rapp) Deuteronomy 27:19

¹⁹ “*Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.*” All the people shall say, “Amen!”

(Webster) Matthew 5:34-40

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when

was it that *we saw you a stranger and welcomed you*, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just *as you did it to one of the least of these* who are members of my family,^[a] you did it to me.'

(Webster) Acts 10:34-35 (CEV)

³⁴ Peter then said:

Now I am certain that *God treats all people alike*. ³⁵ God is pleased with everyone who worships him and does right, no matter what nation they come from.

(Marianne) Hebrews 13:1-3

13 Let mutual love continue. ² Do not neglect to *show hospitality to strangers*, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.^[a]

(Marianne) Romans 13:8-10

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, *love is the fulfilling of the law*.

Have you noticed the themes, the pervasive threads that run throughout?

Themes such as:

+Treat the stranger as equals because **YOU were once a stranger yourself**

+Treat the "other" **as we treat ourselves**.

+**Love** the aliens as you love yourself, for **you were aliens**.

+Be **fair** and **just** to the aliens

+Loving your neighbor includes caring for the welfare of others, to see Jesus in them

+God treats all people **alike**.

+We are to **seek opportunities** to be hospitable to strangers.

+**Love is the fulfillment of the law**

In God's eyes, all are worthy of equal treatment, including refugees, immigrants and strangers. This theme is a major artery of our spiritual heritage, the blood of life, pulsing throughout the Scriptures over a period of thousands of years, repeated like a heartbeat. Why are these themes repeated so often? Because they are important. Because they should be foundational to our faith. And because the people of God forget! We fail to learn, fail to remember these truths, when left to our own devices. We tend to forget or ignore them when we feel fearful, threatened or privileged.

As people of God we can be obtuse, deliberately refusing to hear God's call to treat the immigrant or refugee with justice and mercy. And like the lost sheep, in our failure to treat the

alien well, *we* are lost. But if we are to live into our identity as people of God, we can't afford to ignore or forget God's message, God's command to treat the immigrant and the refugee with dignity and respect.

We can hear today's readings as a base line for how we are to live into community, whether it is how we treat those who come to our country seeking asylum at our southern border or how we treat those in our own neighborhoods who might feel they are the stranger. Love fulfilling the law can be a basis for how we make decisions as individuals and as a community.

When we do remember, when we act as instruments of God's long, loving, reach toward the other, we, the lost are found, and there is a great celebration, not only in heaven, but in our own hearts.

So let's remember and let's be ready to celebrate!

Amen.