Sermon Helps: Matthew 25

Immigration Info:

* Most people know that our system is ineffective. If you get a step closer, you realize that it is illogical - and a step closer yet and you discover that it is profoundly inhumane. You cannot immigrate to the US just because you want to pursue the American dream; You must fit into very specific categories, and all of them are problematic. Examples:

Category #1: Family Unity:

* Citizen children cannot petition for their undocumented parents except in cases of extreme and unusual hardship.
* The “bar”, part of the 1995 immigration bill, states that anyone who has been here a year without documentation must return to their home country for 10 years before being considered for legal residency – even if they are married to a US citizen. This means that most “Dreamers” (individuals brought as small children) don’t have a line to stand in that is less than 10 years long. Dreamers are likely to marry citizens (as they grow up together) causing many couples/families to face potential separation.

Category #2: Labor:

* For most of our national history, we have imported the vast majority of our farm labor. (Slavery was a giant program to import farm labor.) However, also since 1995, we have a flat cap of 5,000 visas per year for all unskilled laborers, including farm labor. We have a very small guest worker program (about 200,000 people). We have the technological capacity to calculate our labor needs and set caps accordingly – but we don’t.

Category #3: Asylum:

* Since WWII, we have a national commitment to provide refuge to people with a credible fear of violent persecution in their home countries. However, we do not provide guaranteed legal representation, even if the person petitioning for asylum is a child or youth. Over 77% of unaccompanied children and youth from Central America are approved for asylum if they have legal representation; only 7% if they don’t.

Cruel and Unusual Punishment:

* If you use a false green card, you will pay a fine. If you use a false birth certificate, you have committed a special felony with a penalty of a lifetime bar to immigration – even if you have a US citizen spouse and children.
* If you have a deportation order (which can simply come from missing a court date or from returning once you have been deported), it can only be overturned and your case re-opened by the judge who gave the order or the ICE Field Office Director. As a result, we have immigrants – such as the Assemblies of God Pastor who is married to a US citizen with two citizen children and has been serving a church in the US for over 20 years – who is facing deportation because he came here as a teenager and was deported.

Recent Changes:

* The current administration is not focused on “bad hombres”. Over 90% of those deported by the Obama administration had committed serious crimes. The Trump administration prioritizes people who have been accused of a crime and not convicted as well as those who have committed “chargeable” offenses. They are also fine with picking up “collateral damage”, people who are in the vicinity of an arrest and do not have papers on them, regardless of their situation or status. (25% of those recently deported in Los Angeles sweeps did not have any kind of criminal record and at least one had a live case in the courts for residency.)
* Unaccompanied children and youth can no longer have sponsors who are undocumented, and children or youth without sponsors are on the fast track for processing, even if they do not have legal representation. Most do not.

Immigration Myths:

* Taxes: Over 90% of undocumented men are employed. Over half are using a false social security number. Our Social Security Administration has a special fund (about 8 billion a year) for the deductions from these false numbers. They will never see a penny of these funds; they go into the general system. Even documented immigrants are not eligible for federal government programs, and undocumented immigrants who receive any government help from local or state governments will find that it creates a barrier to any ultimate adjustment of status. Immigrants also pay sales taxes and business taxes. (They can operate small businesses and are more likely to do so than citizens.)
* Safety: Undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than legal residents.

Scripture:

* There are 92 verses which call us to provide hospitality to the stranger. Henri Nouen says that one of the core movements of the Christian life is from hostility to hospitality.
* Do we see the other as a threat or a blessing? Hebrews 13:2 and Genesis 12 are both good examples of how the other may be an angel, a messenger of God sent to bring a blessing.
* God takes it personally when we reject or welcome the stranger.