ON WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS & REFUGEES

Some Old Testament Perspectives
Notes and slides available at:
http://karlmoeller.net/talks/
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Old Testament Perspectives

Session 2
Jesus as Refugee, Hospitality and Table Fellowship

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Jesus, Disgust Psychology and the Call to Reckless Love and Generosity

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Reflections on Hospitality and Embrace
The Patriarchs and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

‘Abraham begins as a voluntary migrant, but then lives in Egypt as an environmentally induced, externally displaced person. Isaac is born to immigrant parents, and he subsequently becomes an environmentally induced, internally displaced person. Finally, Jacob is a third generation migrant who involuntarily migrates to seek asylum for fear of physical harm.’

(Casey Strine, ‘More than Neighbours?’, p. 6)
‘These immigrants are willing to descend into the depths of hell ... for the people they love so that they may have better lives’.

‘Like Jesus, many of these immigrants sacrifice their comfort and risk their lives for the good of others’.

(Daniel Groody, *Border of Death*, pp. 32, 33)
ger (גֵּר)

- ‘sojourner’
- ‘alien’
- ‘resident alien’
- ‘stranger’
- ‘immigrant’
‘Nobody has a great name in the history of dislocation’.

(Walter Brueggemann, The Land, p. 18)
'Ruth in Boaz's Field', Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1828)
‘In the entire epic of Israel, only Abraham matches this radicality, but then he had a call from God .... Divine promise motivated and sustained his leap of faith. Besides, Abraham was a man, with a wife and other possessions to accompany him. **Ruth stands alone; she possesses nothing. No God has called her; no deity has promised her blessing; no human being has come to her aid. ... Consequently, not even Abraham’s leap of faith surpasses this decision of Ruth’s.’

(Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 173)
Psalm 137 (Excerpt)

Alongside Babylon’s streams, there we sat down, crying because we remembered Zion.
... our captors asked us to sing; our tormentors requested songs of joy
But how could we possibly sing the LORD’s song on foreign soil?
Jerusalem! If I forget you, let my strong hand wither!
... LORD, remember what the Edomites did on Jerusalem’s dark day
... Daughter Babylon, you destroyer, a blessing on the one who pays you back the very deed you did to us!
A blessing on the one who seizes your children and smashes them against the rock!
The sound of sobbing is heard from Zion: ‘We’re devastated! We’re so ashamed! We have to leave the land and abandon our homes!’

... Death has climbed through our windows; it has entered our fortresses to eliminate children from the streets, the youth from the squares. Declare what the Lord says: Dead bodies will lie like dung on the fields, like bundles of grain after the harvest, with no one to pick them up.
Gift Thanksgiving
‘Our human relationships easily become subject to violence and destruction when we treat our own and other people’s lives as properties to be defended or conquered and not as gifts to be received’.

(Henri Nouwen, Reaching Out, p. 119)
Hospitality is not only ‘a statement about how we perceive ownership and possession’, it also protects us from abusing ownership and possession.

(Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God*, pp. 48-49)
Gift

Thanksgiving

Generosity
'Land with [God] brings responsibility. The same land that is gift freely given is task sharply put'.

(Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*, p. 56)
Leviticus 19:33-34

When immigrants live in your land with you, you must not cheat them. Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.
Every third year you must bring the tenth part of your produce from that year and leave it at your city gates. Then the Levites, who have no designated inheritance like you do, along with the immigrants, orphans, and widows who live in your cities, will come and feast until they are full. Do this so that the LORD your God might bless you in everything you do.
Deuteronomy 26:5-12

‘My father was a starving Aramean. He went down to Egypt, living as an immigrant there .... God saw our misery, our trouble, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt ... and gave us this land – a land full of milk and honey.’ ... celebrate all the good things the LORD your God has done for you and your family – each one of you along with the Levites and the immigrants who are among you. When you have finished paying the entire tenth part of your produce in the third year ... you will give it to the Levites, the immigrants, the orphans, and the widows so they can eat in your cities until they are full.
Jeremiah 7:5-7

If you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don’t shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, only then will I dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time.
• the Old Testament as ‘a book by migrants for migrants’

• Casey Strine’s characterisation of the patriarchs, employing the language used by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

• Sarah and Rebekah – and the experience of female migrants today

• the immigrants’ sacrifice as exemplifying that ‘no one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends’ (John 15:13)

• Hebrew ger as ‘immigrant’ – how does that change our reading of the biblical texts?

• Ruth’s exemplary devotion to Naomi – and the failure to fully integrate her into Bethlehemite society

• Psalm 137, Lamentations and Jeremiah 9:19-22 as expressions of displaced people

• the framework of gift, thanksgiving and generosity – and our own approach to life
  • To what extent does the church operate with such a framework?
  • To what extent are we influenced by the values of our culture (e.g. individualism and consumerism)?

• the ‘myth of scarcity’

• us having no ultimate claim to the land, which belongs to God

• Israel’s seasonal rhythm of thanksgiving – and what we can learn from that

• the Old Testament laws regarding the treatment of immigrants – and what they might mean for us today