



You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? ~Psalm 88:8-10

One year ago, the media frenzy that briefly gripped the nation in September and October over possible cases of Ebola virus disease in the United States was finally slowing. The Centers for Disease Control declared the Ebola outbreak in Texas over on November 7, 2014. An aid worker who had contracted Ebola while working in Guinea with Doctors without Borders was discharged from Bellevue Hospital Center on November 11. With the holidays around the corner, we moved on. The Ebola epidemic in West Africa, however, remained. It is still not entirely over. There were three new confirmed cases of Ebola in Guinea on October 28.

I teach social work at Calvin College. This June, I was in Monrovia, Liberia, working with social workers at our partner institution there as they address the aftermath of the Ebola crisis. There I met Jebbeh Kamara. Jebbeh has lived in a home made of thatch mats, bits of corrugated zinc panels, and sheets of plastic since coming to the area in 1995 in order to flee violence in another part of the country. She lost her sister, her husband, and three other members of her immediate family during the Ebola crisis. Her neighbors threatened to burn her house down. She is an outcast in her own community. She is now caring for ten children, a mixture of her own children and children from her sister and another female relative who also died. Anything I might say to Jebbeh is inadequate. I have no appropriate response. So I mourn with her. I lament with her and with the psalmist, and I wait. Advent is a season of waiting.

Students often ask me how I personally handle some of the situations social workers encounter. The broken families, the shattered lives. Again, I'm not sure I have an appropriate response. I do know that I am called to love. One of the theologians I admire is Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann believes that in the very nature of the triune God we "find the power to remain in love despite pain and death, becoming neither bitter nor superficial." This is one of my prayers for this season, that as we await the Christ child, we will remain in love, we will allow our hearts to be broken rather than becoming jaded or turning away.

Prayer

Triune God, as we wait on your promises, be with us. When our eyes are dim with grief, fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may love as you love, becoming neither bitter nor superficial.

Joseph Kuilema is an assistant professor of social work at Calvin College.



. . . we belong to the Lord.

Romans 14:8

Belonging. What an elusive concept! It suggests such an incredible richness. It seems that if you know where you belong, you will know a place of acceptance, the certainty of being cherished, and assurances of support. This can be a gift both when your days go well and when messages/attitudes are loud and clear that “You do not belong.”

The closing verses of Romans 8 are etched on my heart, sharing that we belong to the Lord — nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from his love. Translating that into day to day relationships, however, has often left me stymied and unsure. If we belong in the community called church, I’ve often wondered why it always seems so messy in that motley group of sinners/saints.

As a mother of four, I surmised for a while that I belonged to my children. Alongside their dad, I was their source for . . . you name it. What a privilege! It became apparent early in the journey, however, that they did not belong to me. I was to be present, available, if you will, to make their transition into adulthood as smooth as possible — but then . . . there were many spaces in which I no longer belonged. It was mainly about releasing them because they belong to God.

The experience of belonging continued to intrigue and puzzle me. Probably any person seeking to understand the dynamics of it would have a heyday analyzing my formative years. Resisters to belonging, through my life lens, were weakness, sensitivity, and vulnerability. So my default posture became imitative of others, as if to say, “You belong, and I will do my best to mirror that.”

In the fall of 2005, Said, a refugee from Africa who spoke at a promotional dinner for a refugee settlement home, shared what it meant for him to belong after enduring a refugee camp in Africa and then facing the challenge of street life in a large Canadian city. I heard a new call on my life — a call to “offer belonging” to the foreigner among us. I did not know what that might look like, but new friends from around the world became my teachers.

In a refugee settlement home called Micah House, refugee neighbors experienced support in navigating systems with endless applications, appointments, waiting periods, and varied barriers to belonging. In this culture in which time and tasks always present urgency, our guests related time and again how grateful they were for this home in Canada. They found in the midst of losses, trauma, and anxieties a place to belong. As one refugee, Caroline, put it,

“You are a person who is valued, not a number. I always felt cared for!” People shared comments like these again and again: “A place of belonging was extended. . . . This is a home where I know my life matters. . . . I was shown respect and dignity in the midst of chaos, loss, and uncertainty. . . . Acceptance was offered without conditions and judgment.” An eight-year-old Czech girl recently was uncertain about her new housemates from Africa. What bore witness to her young life of belonging were the warm embraces extended across ethnic and cultural differences.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for new neighbors who share their experience of belonging in a new space. During their tumultuous journey, they give reminders of what is really important! Thank you, God, for amazing displays of gratitude in the midst of upheaval, courage in the turbulence of resettlement, resilience in the mayhem of strange life circumstances, and perseverance when all aspects of life tomorrow are uncertain. Thank you for forgiving us when we stumble and fall, for extending the certainty that we belong to you as your imagebearers from all around this world. In your name, Amen.

Katie Karsten is committed to support the resettlement of refugees in her community. She seeks out opportunities to walk alongside this vulnerable people group so that all may experience value, justice, inclusion, and hope.



Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:9-10

His name was Majed. He appeared at the apartment door one day as we were finishing class and said, "I need English," in a loud voice, half demanding, half pleading. He'd come to the right place, but I wasn't sure he would think it was right for him. The class that was leaving was a group of quiet Burmese women, most of them mothers or grandmothers.

I invited Majed to come back the next day; he was welcome to join our class. He came, and he stayed. The women were intimidated by him at first, but they learned to enjoy his loud presence, to allow him to bounce their babies on his knee. He cooked for me — delicious food he'd learned to make in his father's restaurant in Iraq, and told me about his life — things he'd experienced in the Iran-Iraq war, how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder forced him to leave Iraq when the U.S. Army came, how Christians had ministered to him in Lebanon, and how Jesus had appeared to him in a dream and told him to come to America.

Majed said he needed English, but what he really needed was community. He had left the community of family in Iraq because it wasn't safe for him — and for reasons I don't understand he was disconnected from the Iraqi community in our city. He knew only isolation and loneliness in this new place. We took him in and became his family for a time, until the day he left to try to make his way back to his family.

When I think of Majed, I remember that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He brought together the most unlikely people and made them into a new community. Majed had lost all the things we think we deserve in life, but Jesus saw him and was using God's people in different places in the world to care for and call out to him, to draw Majed to himself and give him a new community. God is in the business of saving people. We get the privilege of joining in his work. I haven't seen Majed for over a year. But I know that God sees him, and I'm confident that God will complete the work he began in Majed's life. We were just one stop along the way.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the God who sees. Thank you for the privilege of joining in your work. Give us your eyes and heart as we build places of community for the displaced people of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Theresa Roosendaal works part-time for World Relief as the Refugee Youth Education Specialist & part-time as director of the Family Learning Center in Kennewick, Washington.



"I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Matthew 25:36

The statistics are staggering. More than 2 million people are behind bars in the United States. In Michigan, where I live, 43,000 people are in the state prison system. These cold numbers take on more meaning when we learn that out of every 100 Americans, one is either in prison, in jail, or on parole. Worse yet, one in 30 children has a parent in prison. But this guesstimate from a Michigan warden is especially troubling in the holiday season: only about 12 percent of Michigan prisoners *ever* receive a visit!

At Christmastime this year, think of the households where a mom or dad won't be there to see the kids unwrap gifts. Think of the many holiday tables where there'll be an empty chair. A parent, a sibling, a son or daughter will not be there.

And when I say that, I hope you don't only picture poor people or minorities or people from broken homes.

As I spoke to a group of interested seniors at Calvin College, I noticed a man in the front row nodding in agreement with my statements about Michigan prison conditions. Turns out he had served time. After I spoke to a group of seniors at Aquinas College, a very nice woman quietly approached me with tears streaming down her face. Her son was behind bars. During a Grand Haven presentation, as I described Michigan's shameful treatment of female prisoners, I could see anger in the face of a young woman in the audience. I learned later that she had recently been released, and knew exactly what I was talking about.

While there is certainly racial disparity in criminal justice — African American men are far more likely than white men to serve time, even for the same crime — I think it's important to note that this isn't "someone else's problem." Mass incarceration affects *all* of us — regardless of race, income, or social status.

There's a way that we, as members of the Christian church, can responsibly respond to the mandate in Matthew 25. A short note or a quick telephone call is all it would take to make a difference — if not to a prisoner, then to someone who has a friend, relative, or loved one behind bars.

It's simple. It's easy. It expresses the love that we as Christians feel, because we too were once displaced. But through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God has called us out of darkness into light. Do it now, before you forget.

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

Prayer

God of love, we lift up the prisoner to you this morning. We pray for those who are behind bars — of every race, every faith, every gender, every economic class. We lament the incredible numbers of people who are incarcerated in the United States. We pray for their families. May your church become a place of grace, hospitality, generosity, and friendship for all those who are impacted by mass incarceration. Amen.

Doug Tjapkes is a former award-winning broadcast journalist and former seller of church organs. He now serves as the president of *Humanity for Prisoners*, a faith-based prison ministry, and is the author of the book *Sweet Freedom*.



“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:15-16

Twenty-one years of being raised in the CRC has given me plenty of time to learn about belonging. Every Sunday growing up, I went to church with my family, sang familiar hymns, and recited the liturgy that I had inadvertently memorized. The adults in my church were a constant presence in my life as Sunday school teachers and after-church coffee drinkers, and they could always be counted on to donate toward my school fundraisers and our youth group bake sale. This was a community in which everyone knew my name, and where I felt like I belonged.

But there was one important lesson, in the midst of reciting the Heidelberg Catechism and learning to lead worship, that I missed. It was the lesson of displacement, of learning how to exist gracefully in a place where I and my faith are in the minority. It wasn't until I flew across the country and spent a summer as a janitor that I finally realized how important this lesson was.

I spent the summer after my junior year at Calvin College in Yosemite National Park volunteering with “A Christian Ministry in the National Parks.” I had fellow team members who followed Jesus, but the majority of my coworkers and friends in Yosemite wanted nothing to do with religion. I found myself on edge during serious conversations, afraid I wouldn't be able to do a good enough job of defending what I believed. I felt like an outsider during raucous nights of partying at the community center, choosing instead to walk through the meadows at midnight and look at the stars. Don't get me wrong. People were welcoming and accepting, but I could still feel the weight of difference on my shoulders, the weight of what I believed.

It took a while for me to understand that the weight of difference isn't always a burden. I was in Yosemite because I loved and followed Jesus, and it was a wildly different way of life from that of the people around me — and that was something to be embraced. It was in this time of not belonging that I realized God is present when we, his followers, follow him to places where we don't fit in.

We are called to be lights on a lampstand, cities on a hill. That means that it's not enough to blend in comfortably in our familiar Sunday pew, throw a five in the offering plate, and call

it good. The belonging of believers in the worldwide church is a beautiful thing. But we belong that we might learn, be sent out, be different from the rest of this world. That we might shine, a glimpse of the glory of God made manifest, to our neighborhoods and national parks and the rest of the world.

Prayer

God of strength, give us courage to live faithfully when we feel the weight of difference on our shoulders. Remind us to fix our eyes on you when we find ourselves in places of belonging and in places of discomfort, because you are present in both. Amen.

Bethany Cok is a senior at Calvin College and an intern with World Renew in the Communications Department. She is studying English, Spanish, and French, and is passionate about the outdoors, intentional community, and writing as a way of truth-telling.



Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:11-12

One blustery, cold, December Sunday morning in 2012 Nahum walked into our church building quite early. It was well below -30 degrees Celsius that morning, and the Manitoba wind made it feel worse yet. But Nahum was smiling anyway. “Hello,” he said to me as I opened the door for him, the first to arrive, “My name is Nahum; I am from Honduras. I just moved to Brandon, and I was so glad to find you had a Christian Reformed Church!”

Nahum had come to Brandon to work, and he had come alone, leaving his wife and two daughters behind in Honduras. He was new to Canada but not new to the CRC. He was a longtime member of the CRC in Honduras and sometimes served as a translator for our mission partners in Tegucigalpa. Since that day back in 2012, Nahum has faithfully shown up, has faithfully engaged in community, and has brought friends from all over the world to join our services.

This past spring the government of Canada allowed his wife and daughters to come and join him too. But he had to do it quick. And he needed a bit of financial help. I worried how this church would handle his request. This wasn’t for a mere bag of food or a grocery voucher; it was for airplane tickets, plural.

After discussing the possibility of helping as a council, we circulated the idea among some of the congregation, wanting to make these decisions as a group. And the response: nothing but full-hearted support!

“We were immigrants too,” said some of our elderly Dutch members, “and we couldn’t have gotten where we are now without help. It’s what we do. We are the church.”

We are the church. Dutch. Honduran. Korean. Scottish. Cree. We are the church.

Nahum left his country, but he never left his church family. He just came to another part of it here in Brandon. We welcomed him and his family with open arms just as they embraced us with theirs. We have been so blessed by their coming.

First John 4 reminds us that “if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

It's what we do. We are the church.

In Advent we remember that we belong. All of us. Because of Christ. And when we extend his love, we receive love in return, if only we open our arms and hearts to it. God's love "is made complete in us."

These days, when Sunday morning comes around, I get wonderful hugs and smiles from Nahum's daughters, my little *amigas*. It's what we do. We are the church.

Rev. Thyra VanKeeken is pastor of *First Christian Reformed Church in Brandon, Manitoba*. *Thyra also serves on the committee that supports the work of the Centre for Public Dialogue in Ottawa.*



So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27 (NRSV)

Greek philosopher Plato received praise for his definition of humans as a “featherless bipeds,” until another philosopher, Diogenes, brought a plucked chicken into Plato’s academy and exclaimed, “Behold, I have brought you a man!”

We Christians look to Genesis 1 to describe the heart of being human; we are made in God’s image.

Through the millennia people have said that one or another human characteristic is what makes us God’s imagebearers: our ability to make moral choices, or our reasoning ability, or our spiritual nature.

None of these suggestions, however, incorporates Scripture’s teaching: to image God is to be in relationship. God made us in his image as people in relationship with one another and with God. Genesis 2 even says that something about the “very good” creation was “not good”; Adam was alone. And we Christians profess that God is not a single individual. God is one God in three persons—a divine community! God chose us to image him; God chose us for “friendship” with him, to quote Dutch philosopher Hans Reinders.

Genesis 3 describes the fall of humankind into sin. Though thistles and pain and difficult work were some of the consequences of the fall, the worst consequence was the shattering of relationships with God and with other people. Because loving relationships form the heart of who we are as imagebearers of God, broken relationships rip at the fabric of our identity.

If a person or a group of people is pushed to the side by prejudice or ignorance or pity, that pushing harms not only those who are cut off but also those who do the pushing. Let’s say men from a local group home attend a church regularly, but the church members know nothing about these men, maybe not even their names. Not only are the men isolated from the congregation, but the congregation misses out on the gifts that the men could bring to the life of the congregation; worse yet, the disconnect between the men and the congregation rips at the very image of God that is present there in this body. Though the men may be *among* the others, they are not *with* the others; they are displaced from the community.

We hurt others and ourselves when we push others to the margins, even if we do not mean to show prejudice toward them. When we reach out in love and allow others to love us, God’s image shines through these human relationships. We and they grow more into our identity as

God's imagebearers.

Prayer

God, forgive me for fracturing the image of God in others and in myself out of ignorance or prejudice or pity. Thank you for reconciling me to yourself through Jesus Christ and for giving me a ministry of reconciliation. Make me a reconciler in and through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark Stephenson is the director of Disability Concerns in the Christian Reformed Church.



“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. . . . For surely I know the plans that I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ~Jeremiah 29: 7, 11

I was recently running a workshop in Vancouver, in the well-known Downtown East Side neighbourhood. My colleague and I were at a community centre in the neighbourhood. It was clear that this centre, a beautiful old building that was once a library, had become a welcoming place for members of the community.

My friend Sally, a United Church minister in that same neighbourhood, acted as a guide. A woman walked down the street, yelling at everyone. “She does that a lot,” said Sally, all of us recognizing that the mental health supports the woman needs are just not there. Recently the street population was hit hard by a drug that was causing many deaths. “I would see these guys one night, and the next day they were gone. Then I’d hear they had overdosed,” Sally shared.

Sally knows the people of this community, and the neighbourhood is their place. The community centre is their place. But they need and deserve more. They need a safe place. They need food. They need homes, education, and work. They need a future with hope. We are all a part of building that future.

And we can start by creating welcoming communities of belonging and making sure that all voices are heard. Each of us is enriched when everyone can participate and share in the creative spirit. The “welfare” of our communities is the welfare of each one of us.

As Christians, we are called to pray and act for this better future. This can happen in many ways. We can stand in solidarity with people who are exiled and marginalized. We can make sure that people who are in positions of power, particularly political decision makers, listen and act, as well. Our prayer and action for the welfare of all unite our plans with God’s vision, leading us closer to the fulfillment of our hope.

Prayer

God, we pray that you ground us and guide us in the work that we must do to ensure that all of us can walk together with people who are exiled and marginalized toward the future, in hope. Amen.

Darlene O’Leary is a socioeconomic policy analyst with Citizens for Public Justice, a Christian, member-driven, public policy organization in Ottawa, Ontario.



The LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

Exodus 3:7-8 (NRSV)

"I have observed the misery of my people"

Misery marched through Egypt in 2015 too. Some of my Central American neighbors have fled webs of violence and poverty as well. When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph feared for their son's life on account of Herod and fled to Egypt (Matt. 2). Jesus was a refugee as a young boy because of the misery of Herod's infanticide. God the Son experienced misery and displacement about as soon as he experienced the other basics of life.

"I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters"

The Israelites were crying out not because of bad luck but because there were taskmasters; injustice was being done to them. Of course, there are still taskmasters. The Honduran Institute of Social Security, which manages the country's public health system, was ransacked for over \$200 million dollars, stripping the public of good medical care. We don't know everyone implicated yet, but we are assured by the writer of Exodus that when we are victims of corruption, God hears our protests. Before Jesus was born, Mary affirmed that God not only hears but also acts against evil in history. Her song of praise clamored of God's faithfulness and of his justice for the humble (Luke 1:46-56).

"I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians"

So God faithfully delivered his people from their oppressors, even though it was a long, long road for a displaced people to the promised land. Luke tells us that Jesus' parents were a displaced couple who walked a long, long road too: "This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:2).

Today too, many are leaving Syria for a promised land of their own. Syrians, Hondurans, and many others are headed north. Will these northern cities be a promised land for displaced people? As followers of the Son of a displaced couple, we are called to take part in God's deliverance and desire for the well-being of these people who are seeking justice and hope.

"To a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey"

Misery does not get the last word. The migration of the Israelites was an act of hope for new life in a promised land. A righteous, devout, and old Simeon widened and deepened the promise we hope for when he spoke of the baby Jesus: “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32). **There is misery, but Christmas is the first assurance that all of us, a displaced people, belong to the full, plain-as-day kingdom of God.**

Niko Aberle is a proud Oregonian who recently graduated from Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. He is currently living in Tegucigalpa as a fellow with the Association for a More Just Society — Honduras, a Christian organization focused on anticorruption and peace and public security in Honduras.



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Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4-5

Being and ministering among an immigrant community that is downtrodden, my wife and I have often reflected on the vital role of the church to provide the crucial element of belonging. The Haitian community in the Dominican Republic includes immigrants — both long-term and newly arrived, both documented and undocumented — as well as second, third, etc. generations who are Dominican citizens by birth but are often denied even that basic human right because of their parentage. The CRC-DR is their church and community, and it provides a sense of belonging for a people-group that otherwise would not belong anywhere. Most can't go back to Haiti. They never had any documentation there, even if they were born there. And if they were born in the DR, then Haiti is for them a foreign country, even if they speak the language. Further, if they do speak Haitian Creole, it is a Dominicanized version that is quickly detected in Haiti, creating other barriers.

One may wonder why Haitians are in the Dominican Republic in the first place. Historically, there was always a lot of migration back and forth between the two small neighboring countries. And throughout the 1900s the growing Dominican sugar cane industry, which had been the number-one economic motor of the country for hundreds of years, needed manual labor. So the cane companies, and mainly the government-owned company, sought Haitian cane cutters through official programs and treaties with Haiti, as well as by private recruitment. That was because Dominicans would not cut sugar cane. In spite of the fact that sugar money built the infrastructure and economy of the DR on the backs of Haitian cane cutters, Haitians were often not afforded the required work permits and other legal documents needed for basic life in the country. What's more, they had to deal with poor pay, treatment, and living conditions. As that situation continued for decades, it became a recipe for deep-rooted social and economic marginalization.

Christians in the Haitian community in the DR can attend a Dominican church. But they will likely never be considered for involvement in active ministry, much less for a leadership role. So a Haitian denomination in which they truly belong is a welcome community. It is really "theirs."

Jesus was himself an outsider on earth because of his divine nature. And when he was taken to Egypt as a young child, he was what we would today call a Palestinian refugee. When he

went to Jerusalem, he was easily identified as someone from Galilee, with the reputation of a "country hick." Even back in Galilee, his hometown of Nazareth was looked down on. And when he preached in his hometown, the people tried to throw him off a cliff.

But the church, as Jesus said, was not to be that way. In the church, one truly belongs.

Steve Brauning and his wife, Sandra, work with a ministry team serving alongside three ministry partners: the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic, the Christian Reformed Schools in the Dominican Republic, and the Center for Transforming Mission.



By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . .

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Hebrews 11:8-10, 24-27

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

Matthew 10:37-42

Background

Hebrews 11 and Matthew 10 speak with great relevance and complement each other on the issue of displacement. Hebrews was written for a time when God's people were being scattered. They were losing homes and lands, families and connections. The Jewish diaspora was being targeted by tyrants for extermination. Believers walked by faith, not by sight, searching for a promised land with new homes whose origin and designer and protector would be God himself.

Hebrews' message centers on Christ as the principal priest, primary representative, and perfect example of living by faith through a life of suffering and unjust persecution—to the extent that Jesus, God's Son, might be rightly compared to the displaced of human history—the most "displaced" of all, the most cast out, and most rejected. Having set aside his own

rights and interests, given up his place in God the Father's presence, and made himself nothing, even taking on the very nature of a servant (cf. Isa. 53:3; Phil. 2:6-8; John 1:9-11). Christ Jesus knew the path and plight of the displaced.

Matthew's gospel was written to the outcast—and in chapter 10 Jesus challenges his disciples to walk the path of displacement with him. Jesus sends his disciples from being in the comfortable surroundings of loved ones to having their faith under fire. To be his true disciples and God's modern-day prophets, they would need to learn to live by faith and to carry their crosses. They would need to become a generation who could follow Moses' and Abraham's examples.

Today

Jumping to the present, we see mass movements happening in Egypt and across the Middle East. The Muslim and Christian Arab diaspora is scattered and reaches the ends of the earth, lacking connection, opportunity, safety, and sustenance. Some take savings or possessions with them, but with today's global economy, weakening Middle Eastern currencies, near-certain joblessness, and wide language barriers, the gulf of disparity expands. Refugees deal with urbanization and poverty at unparalleled levels—entire villages or families move to the fringes of global megacities to set up camp; the elderly and poor struggle through their days; street children deal with indescribable trauma and shivering nights. Syrian, Tunisian, and Egyptian youths, journeying far from family in hopes of finding jobs, grow tired and weary of their Arab Springs and lose hope of ever returning.

These are the displaced. Their frustration mixes with dejection. Young, old, individuals, groups—all migrating from rural to urban, south to north, and nation to nation—millions are being forced to descend to more costly levels of faith than they could be prepared for or could ever imagine. The result of all this is that these displaced die or live, either by despairing or by finding faith on new soil. And for those who have faith, though they don't all know it, they are the modern-day Abrahams, blessing their new nations, and the twenty-first century Moseses, leading others to freedom.

But how does this affect us? If we are not among them, then they are among us. If we are not the Arab refugee or migrant worker, then we are called to welcome them, as hosts, to work to extend their hope, sharing hospitality, to prepare for them and not forget them. We who have must work and pray for those who have not—for they are moving in Christ's name, by God's hand, and they need to hear the name of Christ.

This is the tone and direction that Hebrews 11-13 and Matthew 10 take. Both Hebrews (13:1-3) and Matthew 10 conclude with invitations to welcome the tired representative of Christ, to remember the stranger, to offer to even the least of these a cup of cold water—and in this, to be blessed, or possibly, to show hospitality to angels.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, daily we hear about the needs of displaced people—and you yourself experienced what it was like to grow up on the move, to flee for your life, to have no place to lay your head, to be misunderstood, and all the while to grow as a follower of Abraham and Moses. We ask that you will anoint those who are following in your footsteps today—gift them with faith, seal them by your Holy Spirit, and enable them to truly become your people and to

shed light in darkness, as you did.

But we pray also for our own needs—you challenged us to learn from the outcast, to take up our cross, and to experience what it means to live by faith, not by sight. Anoint us too—make us become poor for your sake, loosen our grip on wealth, cause us to share what is not ours, and bless us with the opportunity to show hospitality to the angels you bring our way. Help us, Lord Jesus; have mercy on us all, and let us be one—for the sake of your name. Amen.

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“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” ~Isaiah 54:10

As winter approaches, it is difficult not to think about the thousands of refugees who remain in refugee camps, particularly across parts of Eastern Europe. I can only imagine how individuals who have fled war-torn areas must feel. Their lives have been shaken, and their stability has been removed. Uncertainty lies ahead of them.

As the body of Christ, we’re called to play a unique and vital role in the world – to be Jesus’s hands and feet to the destitute and displaced. What does that look like in relation to the current global refugee crisis? God calls us to “extend hospitality to strangers” (Rom. 12:13). To those who are not only strangers but have been forced to flee life-threatening situations, we must demonstrate an even higher level of mercy and compassion. Churches and people of faith have a special role to play in easing the plight of refugees. Since the 1970s, church groups in Canada have participated in private refugee sponsorship. Now, as millions of refugees flee Syria, we have an opportunity again to show the love of Christ.

Citizens for Public Justice monitors the ever-changing landscape of [refugee](#) legislation in Canada. Several policy changes have added massive burdens of time, money, and resources to refugees and the groups who sponsor and support them. Refugee sponsorship is not easy. It is a sacrificial act that speaks directly to God’s call to “extend hospitality to strangers.” As we make this sacrifice in the public sphere, we expect our society and our nation to support us in this work. So we must not be afraid to speak out against policies that disregard the rights and experiences of people who are now finding a home with us.

To our brothers and sisters who have been forced to abandon their homes, we can carry out God’s covenant by welcoming them into a new space of belonging. While our homes cannot replace what has been lost, they can provide sanctuary and community in the midst of trauma and displacement. In doing so, we can fulfill the covenant of protection and peace for people whom God loves.

Prayer *Jesus, in compassion, help us to embrace people who have been displaced because of war and conflict. May we be ambassadors of peace as we welcome refugees into a new space of belonging.*

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You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people. . . .

Ephesians 3:19

Last December I had an experience that taught me about how the church can be an inclusive and celebratory place, where displaced and out of place people can find refuge in unexpected ways. Twice over the past five years I have served as faculty director for a study program my college hosts in Budapest, Hungary. In this role I have required students to participate in service-learning as a part of their academic and cultural learning in and around Budapest. One thing we learn early on is that Hungarians have a complicated relationship with non-Hungarians, especially those who are not Christians. Hungary's predominant religious tradition is Catholicism, so during December the city of Budapest is lit up with Advent wreaths on every public square, and a general overall national celebration takes place throughout the Christmas season.

Two of my students, Ellie and Tonisha, were placed with a refugee-serving organization in partnership with the Hungarian Reformed Church. This organization, RMK, partnered with the small church my family and I attended, the St. Columba Church, affiliated with both the Church of Scotland and the Hungarian Reformed Church. Most of the refugee families my students were getting to know were from Muslim backgrounds — and were thereby out of place in Hungarian society both nationally and religiously. One of my best memories of last December was of a Christmas party held at the church for the refugee families and friends of the church. Here is what Ellie, from Minnesota, wrote about the party:

“RMK had their annual Christmas party on the Wednesday before we left, and it was an absolute blast. There was amazing Persian food, folk music, Hungarian dancing, gift-giving, and lots of laughter. The church that hosted the party was packed, and the atmosphere was bustling and warm. Our group spent a lot of time this semester learning and thinking about what ‘beloved community’ is and what it looks like. **As we held sweaty hands and danced in a circle, laughing as we stumbled, trying to learn the steps, I realized that this is what beloved community looks like.** It is the image of unity in the midst of diversity. It is choosing to build bridges and come together, not allowing differences to divide us and destroy the potential of authentic love and community. There was an openness, a freedom, and a spirit of acceptance and love in the atmosphere. It was a privilege to simply witness this and to be a part of the RMK community for a few short months; the people I met there will never know how much they blessed me.”

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He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

Ephesians 1:5-8 (NRSV)

As a part of my job, I have the privilege of working with children who have been internationally adopted and with their adoptive families. My heart is often broken by the stories of these children's early beginnings. I'm humbled by their parents' commitments and the distances they have traveled, both literally and figuratively, to form their family. I'm amazed by people's resilience in the face of adoptive challenges. Although there are some important differences between "earthly adoption" and our adoption as God's children, my interactions with these families reminds me of the belonging we can experience in the family of God.

God freely chooses to adopt us into his family, by grace, through Jesus' death on the cross. This choice is made in love and also as a way to display his glory. Several passages in the Bible emphasize the closeness and depth of this new relationship we have with God. We are able to address him with words that display trust and intimacy. For example, the use of the term "Abba" emphasizes that we are dependent, that we can trust God, and that he desires a close relationship with us, his adopted children. Beyond this, we are true heirs through this adoption, not second-class members of his family. We truly and deeply belong!

As a result of God's adoption of us through Christ, several important outcomes follow. First, we are made right with God as if we had never sinned. Second, we are granted entry into eternal life. The sacrament of baptism is a powerful symbol of this justification by grace and our adoption into God's family.

The knowledge of our adoption through grace, along with the working of the Holy Spirit, awakens in us gratitude for the sacrifice made by Christ as well as a desire to be more like God, our Father. We have a desire as adopted children to take on the "family likeness." This means that we need to care about the things that God cares about, namely, the vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized. God even specifically calls for us to turn our attention toward children who do not have families (James 1:27). In this Advent season, and throughout the year, we should care about adoption both because we are thankful for our own adoption through grace and because we want to conform to God's likeness, part of which involves deep care for the most vulnerable among us.

Prayer

Thank you, Abba, for taking me as your child. By your grace, I am no longer a stranger to you but have become a member of your household. Help me each day to become more like you, focusing on carrying out your work and loving others as you love me.

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Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. . . . Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies. Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. . . . For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

Hebrews 13:1, 3, 5 (NLT)

My mother used to listen to a song that said, "This world is not my home / I'm just a-passing through" – and I still remember the wistfulness of the words, like I remember the loud voice of a preacher who shouted, "I don't belong here! When I think of heaven, I get homesick!"

In a way, I understand – the deep rift between what is and what we are promised in the new heaven and earth is jarring. It can make us reel with the same longing as homesickness. We know we are destined for something greater than this broken earth, as verses like Hebrews 13:14 point out: "This world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come."

Yet in this season we remember a baby who was born into this world, wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in straw, a fragile life inhabiting a specific time, a specific place. As pearls don't belong before swine, that baby didn't belong here – but he made himself at home. Sometimes we forget this – as long as he walked this earth, he was not Jesus of Heaven; he was Jesus of Nazareth.

In a temporary home there is no need to put up curtains and artwork, no need to fix the sagging roof or pitted floors, to get to know the neighbors, to invite them in. But how much richer do those actions make the lives of ourselves and others while we wait? Though his time on earth was temporary, Jesus put himself to work. He gave himself over to housekeeping, tidying, brightening, tearing down walls and building them back up.

Following the model of Christ, we too should practice on earth our taste for home, working with God to bring about his kingdom, our permanent home, on earth. Tugs of homesickness should compel us not to give up on this place but to dedicate ourselves to its repair and renewal.

In Hebrews 13, we read detailed instructions about how to make earth more like our permanent home: "Show hospitality to strangers"; "Remember those in prison"; "Don't love money"; "Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies." Is this the type of caretaking we are prepared to do?

In the name of the baby whom the bright star announced – let's let our longing for heaven

propel us here to make ourselves at home.

Prayer

As we make our home on earth, Lord, open our eyes to our neighbors who have no homes, to refugees and immigrants searching for new homes, to widows and orphans, to all who are incarcerated – everyone for whom home is complicated, or for whom home feels empty. Allow us to make ourselves at home by helping others to find their home in you. In the name of our Savior who made his home here, let us live contentedly in the kingdom that is “already” while looking forward to the kingdom that is “not yet.” In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Katerina Parsons has called both Jackson, Michigan, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, home and now makes her home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where she works with the Association for a More Just Society. A Calvin College graduate, she enjoys thinking and writing about development, justice, and the joys and challenges of living abroad.



The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Jeremiah 33:14-16

This text from Jeremiah 33 has me thinking about creation. Jeremiah spoke these words after the kingdom of Judah had been conquered and carried off into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah, the prophet who had warned the people of this eventuality from the beginning, was left to make some sort of sense out of it for the people. What message of hope and comfort could he possibly offer to the people of God who were languishing in exile thousands of miles from their homes?

Rather than speak words of bitterness or even of satisfied vindication (I have to imagine that "I told you so" was in the front of Jeremiah's mind at this point), Jeremiah offers words of reconciliation and restoration. He reminds the people who God is: a liberator who can't help rescuing his covenant people from themselves. Despite the people's egregious covenant betrayal, "Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety."

"The LORD will do this," assures Jeremiah, as if to say. *"He can't help himself."*

And what is the gospel if not the definitive revelation that this reckless, divine love extends beyond Israel and encompasses the whole of the created cosmos? In Jesus, we see firsthand the truth that matter has always mattered to God. God lavishly displays his love in the world around us and is always using the stuff of this world—be it flesh, water, bread, or wine—to reveal himself. Nowhere is this more powerfully on display than in the incarnation, when the Word that created matter assumed it in order to redeem it.

Like Israel in the 6th century B.C., creation is in exile. Depleted soils, polluted rivers, leveled mountaintops, rising seas, and a warming climate — and the people who depend on these soils, rivers, mountains, and seas for their very livelihoods — cry out for restoration. And it is to them that Jeremiah speaks: "Hold fast. Restoration is coming."

The entire world is currently gathered in Paris at the COP 21 climate negotiations. In its sights is nothing less than a global agreement on curbing carbon emissions and addressing the dangers of climate change. The CRC is present at the meetings, [doing its own small part](#) to witness to the dual truths that creation is groaning, but restoration is coming. And how

fitting that this global meeting of potentially historic proportions is occurring during Advent—the season in which our waiting seems most pronounced, most plaintive, and most hopeful. We are waiting, but we are not without hope. We are waiting because there is something coming worth waiting for. We are waiting, but we are not passive. We are waiting with hope, and we are waiting with action. Today may seem dark, but -- take heart -- Christmas is coming. The time is coming when we will remember again that the Creator of the universe loves his creation so much that he put on skin and moved into our world in order to give us a hope that can never be extinguished.

Take heart. Restoration is coming.

Prayer

Creator God, you are a God who cannot help chasing after your exiled creation with reckless and liberating love. Remind your people that though the present may seem dark, restoration has come through Jesus Christ. May we be witnesses to this restoration in the midst of a groaning world even as we eagerly look for its final consummation.

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“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”

Leviticus 19:33-34

As we approach Christmas, we anticipate a time of strangers at church. It's a time when those who attend church once or twice a year come, and a time when people who are alone for the holidays come, seeking human companionship. How will we receive them?

While in college, I spent much of my first two years church hopping. At the typical service, the only time anyone spoke to me was during the greetings at the start. “Good morning, good morning, good morning, good morning,” I would repeat, smiling with and at glassy eyes, unseeing and unseen. After the service, I would generally wait five or ten minutes, and then leave. It was rare when someone approached me after the service. I never went back to any church where I wasn't welcomed, where no one tried to help me belong.

After moving recently, my wife and I had to begin church hunting all over again. But this time, it wasn't just churches that ignored us (and that we never returned to); it was churches that made us feel out of place. My wife is from Costa Rica and is Hispanic. Several churches we attended made us feel awkward. It was a new experience for me, being a tall, white, blue-eyed man from the Grand Rapids area. It wasn't that nobody talked to us, but instead people seemed to speak past us, speaking to the people they imagined us to be. One couple even asked my wife where she was from before asking what her name was.

I began to realize, slowly, that there wasn't room for us in these churches. There was space on the pews, and space on the register, but there wasn't space for a white man with growing Latin American tendencies and a Latina woman with growing white American tendencies. We chafed against the boundaries that were placed around us, implicitly or explicitly.

As we approach Christmas, and as we move beyond, we anticipate strangers in our churches. How will we make room for them? If we are aliens in the world, belonging to the kingdom of God, how will we make room for others? Will we set a place for them, whoever and whatever they are?

Prayer

Lord of all, who brought Israel out of Egypt, we pray that we would be receptive to your people. We pray that we would remember our citizenship, and remember what it feels like to be aliens in this world. We ask this so that we might be better equipped to welcome strangers

who visit us, to accept foreigners in our churches, and to make room for the diversity of the humans you call into your kingdom. Amen.

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But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:10-12

The memory is forever etched in my mind, even though it's from many years ago. A Ugandan woman in a camp for internally displaced people (IDP) is boiling a bony little hedgehog. Three little children look up at her with thirsty brown eyes filled with hope that something will fill their growling stomachs. She talks quietly with barely enough energy to stir the broth. She tells me that her husband was killed in the civil strife and they had to flee from their farm to this camp, where all they have is a reed mat to sleep on, one pot for cooking, and a handful of clothes to wear. She worries about tomorrow's food for the family. She wonders if she will need to sell herself in payment for food from someone. It is an agonizing choice because the risk of HIV/AIDS is high. How can she experience the embrace of God at such a time like this?

A package from World Renew's church partner is given to her. She cries with joy as she uncovers the blankets and bucket filled with poscho (local maize meal), beans, and a few kitchen utensils. Her hands rise up in prayer with thanks to God, for she has witnessed his compassion. It's a gift of life that lasts at least for a month.

Determined to deal with the underlying injustices and root causes of the conflict behind all the IDP camps, World Renew supported this woman's community leaders to identify long-term solutions. Martin Ononge was the visionary leader who convinced the community to give land to the youth involved in the civil strife. That way, they could leave their senseless fighting and killing to grow crops like sweet potatoes, sell them, and earn enough money to go to school, get married, and support a family. The solution worked more effectively than anyone dreamed. The youth left their bush war and worked hard in the fields to grow their crops. As peace returned, families went back to their farms. The community leaders helped to market the crops in major cities, reaping income levels that went well beyond family needs.

They used the extra funds to build a technical training school for youths to learn carpentry and tailoring. It was a gift of life that lasted for years, as peace and economic development have continued to the present day.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Global Appeal 2015 Update, there are 33.3 million IDPs worldwide as a result of conflicts and violence. IDPs are often the most vulnerable population in the world, whose rights must be upheld by their nations as well as by organizations like World Renew that seek to assist in restoring their livelihoods.

In remembering our Savior's birth this Christmas season, let's remember his concern and express it by embracing support for the millions of people who are displaced around the world. Let us remember that Christ himself was displaced as a baby as a result of King Herod's orders to kill all the boys up to age two in Bethlehem. His parents had to flee to Egypt, where they lived as displaced persons until Herod died. Christ's life was spared so that he could extend God's embrace to the whole world. We are a people spiritually displaced; we are distanced by sin in our relationship with God. Christ was and is our gift of eternal life and salvation, enabling us to be embraced and to embrace others with the fullness of his love. How will you extend his embracing love to those who are physically and spiritually displaced today?

Prayer

Holy One, you have drawn near to us. You have given us life, belonging, reconciliation, hope. May we have eyes to see those to whom we might draw near. May ours be the hands that offer life, belonging, reconciliation, and hope — gifts which come from you — to someone you love during this Advent season. Amen.

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo is the director of World Renew - Canada.



Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

Ezekiel 37:5-6

There is a mural just down the street from my office in Bogota, Colombia. The giant letters on the wall spell out the word *victima* (victim). Painted between each letter are scenes of normalized life here in Colombia: of small farmers working their land, of the violent invasion of an armed group, of flight to the city, of life in poverty in urban slums, of hope mixed with fear.

In the macabre contest over internally displaced people, Colombia currently sits in second place, after Syria. Conservative numbers indicate over 6 million people have fled their lands because of violence during the 50 years of ongoing internal conflict.

Just around the corner, there is another mural. Once again the words are bold. They proudly proclaim: *La Paz es Ahora* (Peace Is Now). Despite the power of the phrase, it is the accompanying painting that truly shines.

A woman lies on the ground, surrounded by different figures: a small farmer, a Colombian of African descent, an Indigenous woman, and a student. Though the majority of her body is fleshed out, there are a few spots where her skeleton is visible: an arm, a foot, a hand. As she heals, those around her are lifting her from the ground, in a beautiful symbol of both rebirth and resurrection.

This December, I am reminded of the hope of Advent in which the promise of peace, dry bones becoming flesh, lies just around the corner. We celebrate not only the birth of a baby in a stable but also a child who was forced to flee his home, and yet became the Prince of Peace.

For the past three years, the Colombian government and the largest guerilla group, the FARC, have been in peace talks to finally end the nation's conflict. Despite the need for a high-level peace process, the murals reminds me that they who are able to bring peace fully alive are ordinary people, those who live with the impact of conflict and displacement and yet are inspired by the peace of God. I see this fleshed out in meetings, in advocacy, in commitment to nonviolence, in friendship, and in the determination that peace starts now.

Prayer

Prince of Peace, in this Advent season we remember victims of armed conflict and displacement, not only in Colombia but also around the world. We pray not only for government decisions and peace talks but also for the ordinary members of society who are committed to doing the extraordinary in their work for peace. Amen.

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“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

John 14:2-3 (ESV)

As a wedding gift 37 years ago, dear friends gave me and my beautiful bride a photo journal tracing our two lives in parallel tracks from infancy. On one page, you had little Barbara playing by the barn on her family’s farm; on the next, little John at a market in Barcelona; then Barbara with her pet rooster, and in the school marching band. And then John in New Delhi and Rio de Janeiro. A farmer’s daughter and a diplomat’s son – the mismatched settings exposed in the yellowing pages of an old photo album.

And yet for me the match was perfect, because beneath my delight in this lovely woman lurked a deep longing for a real home – a real, permanent place of welcome. And “home” was ingrained in every sinew of Barbara’s life and heart.

The gospel story knows this longing too, doesn’t it? At nearly every turn, it confronts us with the themes of home and homelessness, of belonging and exile. From Adam’s perfect home in the garden; from fallen humanity’s banishment from Eden; from God’s word to Moses that we are houseguests in his land; from corrupted Israel’s exile to Babylon; from Jesus’ welcome-less birth in a cattle shelter outside a crowded inn; to a people who “did not receive him” – in all these we see God’s invitation into communion with him and with one another; and we see the effects of our twisted, broken responses. And yet we hear Christ’s promise that he is also preparing a place for us in his Father’s house.

We hear again and again God’s word of welcome and belonging. This is your land. Your home. You may have been a stranger, but you are now a child and an heir. You have been brought near. You may stay here in peace. Welcome. *Shalom*.

One can scarcely think of a time in history when welcome has been longed for more desperately and by so many than in our time. Globally, more than 230 million migrants live outside the country of their birth, driven by poverty, war, hunger, and environmental degradation. Sixty million of them have been forced to flee from violence.

To this world Jesus of Nazareth offers a promise: You were strangers and sojourners, unfit to live in the presence of God. But through my sacrifice, my resurrection, and my ascension, I am preparing a place of perfect welcome for you – in my Father’s house.

As bearers of the gospel, are we living as those who were once strangers and migrants, now welcomed home by God's grace?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you who received no welcome at your birth, who fled to Egypt from the cruel violence of Herod, grant that we may prepare a place for people who wander, as you now are doing for us. Amen.

John Elwood edits *BelovedPlanet.com*, a voice for creation care from within the Evangelical Christian community. He owns *Good Hand Farm*, which supports more than 700 organic CSA produce memberships in New Jersey, and serves as an elder in the Presbyterian Church in America. He actively partners with the CRCNA Office of Social Justice, the Lausanne Creation Care Network, and the mission agency *Care of Creation, Inc.*