

... the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

These are the words of the late Uruguayan writer and journalist Eduardo Galeano.

It's a beautiful image.

It echoes the beginning of the first Books of Moses, Genesis.

When the world is spoken (or listened) into being.

Bereshit Bara Elohim

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

This carries in Hebrew, a connotation of being filled to brim with goodness.

And if we can read this, not as a theological argument for creationism, but as a mythic foundation for a generous worldview, we hear the echo...

... the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

But when this phrase is placed back in the full quote in which Galeano wrote it there is a sadness.

The world, which is the private property of a few, suffers from amnesia. It is not an innocent amnesia. The owners prefer not to remember that the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/11635-through-the-looking-glass-q-a-with-eduardo-galeano.html>

A preference for non-remembrance...that's an idea that has some deep echoes of the Hebrew Prophets, the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, or some of the more radical ideas of Paul of Tarsus.

Do not forget that you were foreigners in the land of Egypt is an often-repeated phrase in Torah, the law, the teachings of the early Books of Moses, the Hebrew Scriptures or First or Old Testament.

The descendants of Yacov, Jacob, the God-Wrestler, the children of Leah and Rachel, but also the children of two women whom the text seems to prefer not to remember, Bilhah and Zilpah, found sanctuary in Egypt amidst a deadly family.

They found a home when they were displaced.

Do not forget that Yibarhim, Abraham, revered by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, do not forget that under the tree of Marme, Abraham showed hospitality to the G-D who wandered hungry, and thirsty, hot worn dusty feet.

Yibrahim set up a table of welcome in the cool of the shade, took water to cool the feet of the three travelers, and brought forth curds and milk and the meat of a calf and watched while the weary ones ate.

This is said to be the first theophany, the first God human encounter flesh to flesh.

It is notable that it happens in the context of welcoming the weary ones, feeding the hungry ones, tending to the tired ones.

Whenever you did this to one of these, you did so unto me.

... the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

Our reading today from the Christian Scriptures was plucked from its usual context.

These are traditionally the readings for two different days (Epiphany and Childermas) although in the narrative they are part of one section.

In recent years these stories have been getting more attention...Magi from the East coming to meet the child who is born in Bethlehem, who in Hebrew is called Yeshua Ben Myriam, in Arabic is called Īsā ibn Maryam, or in English, Jesus, child of Mary.

While the first part may be more common, it is the second part we heard which normally is reserved for Childermas, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, which falls on December 28, not generally a day folks commonly attend a midweek service.

But this disturbing part of the narrative (left out of most pageants) has taken on a new resonance in this moment.

A king grasping to power orders that the children be put to death and so a family flees in the night.

Nativity scenes have begun appearing on the lawns of certain churches in which the figures are to be found behind fences, often with the child separate from the parents.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/12/08/church-nativity-displays-jesus-mary-joseph-cages-separated-border/>

Often accompanied by a sign that says

Jesus was a refugee.

<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2018/12/5/jesus-was-a-refugee>

Kelly Latimore is an iconographer who grew up seeing blond hair, blue eyed depictions of Jesus.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/iconographer-kelly-latimore-sees-god-plain-sight>

He is now receives lots of attention (and decent amount of hate mail) for icons created that seek to bring this contemporary issues of justice into conversation with the ancient practice of writing (the term is writing instead of painting) icons.

Recently his work got a great deal of attention with Mama, which was written following the murder of George Floyd (it has been installed in The Episcopal Church of Holy Communion in St. Louis, MO.

<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/mama>

So many of Latimore's icons address issues of migrant justice.

In 2008, Latimore met a refugee family in Palestine, in the West Bank who became the inspiration for Refugees, the Holy Family.

<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/refugees-the-holy-family>

A migrant family from the south seeking to cross into the US.

<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/la-sagrada-familia>

Mother of God protectress of the oppressed, Mary and child are behind the interlocking chain fence and instead of a flowing robe, a foil emergency blanket covers her.

<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/mother-of-god-protectress-of-the-oppressed>

Latimore's iconography seeks to address that concept in Galeano's quote,

A tendency towards non-remembrance.

While the concept of refugees and migrant is a phenomenon of modernity because these interact with the dynamic of the modern state, citizenship rights, and what Harsha Walia calls Border Imperialism and so what is experienced about displaced people in the texts of the Christian and Jewish traditions and not entirely the same thing but the resonance remains.

And if we read our Sacred text as a mirror to our world, it is challenging to do so without reading these stories in light of the modern refugee crisis.

In the stories of The Hebrew Scripture we read famine that displaces not only the family of Jacob/Yacov who I have previously mentioned, but also Naomi and her children who are forced to leave Cana and dwell in Moab, modern day Jordan, it is there that Ruth who will become the great-grandmother of David (the second foreign born woman who will be named in the genealogy of Jesus).

The military super-powers of Babylon and Assyria force mass migration, both through human captivity and in response to the devastation caused while in the Christian Scriptures the pressures of both global and local political strife amidst Roman colonialism is the constant backdrop.

And it is always worth remembering that most of the text of the Christian Scripture, is written in or after the second Jewish Roman War in which Jerusalem has been destroyed and there is an ongoing diaspora of the Israelite people throughout the Mediterranean.

But these are not just the unspoken context, but the events surrounding famine and hospitality, exile and return, and the search for safety are central, and hospitality and welcome are central to divine action in the text.

The current emphasis on refugee and displaced people and the resonance with the holy family Mary, Joseph, Jesus – and by the way, if we wrestle their names out of the Anglocentric perspective and call them Miriam, Yusef, Isa or Maira, Jose, Jesus or Yosev, Myriam, Yeshua – when we allow them to more closely reflect the names of displaced people of today and this past century we are challenged to remember how Divinity enfleshed in our text seeks sanctuary again and again and again.

While we remember that the Christian Tradition centres on a Jewish Palestinian Rabbi, we need to also remember that in 1936 the Director of Immigration for the Canadian Government, when asked about how many displaced European Jews that Canada should welcome responded that none was too many!

<https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/auschwitz-jews-not-welcome-in-wartime-canada>

The owners prefer not to remember that the world was born yearning to be a home for everyone.

But it is not only the moral crisis of our world today that is reflected.

It is also the grace and the blessing of the transformative potential of encounter.

When Abraham welcomes weary travellers into the shade, carrying for their bodily needs it is not only they who are blessed, but Abraham in this moment is able to step into the vocation of a blessed ancestor of multitudes.

When Naomi and her sons travel to Moab, who are traditionally enemies of the Israelite people, they are welcomed and when her sons tragically die, Ruth the Moabite, who is under no kinship obligation to care for the aged Naomi does so anyways.

The travellers on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem displaced by the Emperor Augustus' declaration of a census, when Cyrinius was governor of Syria, took it on themselves to care for the expectant mother in their midst, and as I like to remind at Christmas time, the stable in which Jesus is born is not a hut out back, but the part of the family house where the beloved animals would have stayed as well, the family room, not the guest house.

The Biblical vision of hospitality is not one of paternalistic charity but giving and receiving hospitality mutual transformation and in fact salvation – salvation from the humanity eroding indifference to suffering, salvation from stale uniformity and a vocation of wondrous diversity bringing and intertwining gifts.

In our post worship coffee time we will hear stories from folks who have been involved in refugee sponsorship, both within the church and community folks who have or are working with the Knox-Met Refugee Committee.

You'll hear stories of how mutual transformation no less sacred than that of Abraham's.

Today is the 70th Anniversary of The United Nations declaring June 20th as World Refugee Day.

<https://www.facebook.com/ReginaOpenDoor/photos/a.478233815585338/5523914317683904>

The Regina Open Doors Society has set up an outdoor display on the West Side of the Wascana Lake Walking Trail, this display (that can be enjoyed following appropriate COVID-19 precautions)

offers both important information about refugee sponsorship, but also stories of individual experiences, stories of deep resilience, dignity and courage shown amidst some of the most horrific circumstances imaginable.

In the 2020 Refugee Reality Report it was noted that 79.5 million people have been forced to flee their homes because of persecution, war and/or violations of human rights. 11 million people were newly uprooted in 2019. 30,000 people were newly uprooted very day.

According to UNHCR, at the end of 2019, there were 45.7 million internally displaced people and there were 26 million refugees in the world.

48% of the world's refugees are further marginalized as women and girls, and the growth of queer and trans refugees displaced because of violence or legislation continues to outpace research in this area.

50% of the world's refugees are under 18 years old.

85% if the world's refugees are hosted by countries in the global south, themselves struggling amidst colonial pasts and neo-liberal capitalism.

On this 70th Anniversary of World Refugee Day we remember the Migrant God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

We remember both a legacy of compassionate welcome but also those moments when closed hearts and closed borders lead to tragic ends.

We remember the children of Yacov, the children of Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah.

We remember Ruth who begat Obed who begat David.

We remember the holy family fleeing the impotent yet deadly violence of Herod.

We remember Ibrahim who opened his tent to three strangers and found that he welcomed the divine.

We remember that this world was born yearning to be home for everyone.

We remember that more than 26 million human beings, each bearing the divine image still long for a safe sanctuary.

And we remember that we are not alone.