



## Jesus often challenged bigotry against outsiders

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One of the most formative values of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the just treatment of foreigners in our midst.

The laws of Moses include: “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9) Note that this law not only bans oppression against aliens, but also provides the motivation for justice “because you were foreigners in Egypt.” As American Christians with immigrant ancestry (unless we are Native American), can we do anything less?

Of course, there will be those who say this command is found in the Old Testament, not the words of Jesus.

However, Jesus often challenged bigotry against outsiders. He announced the beginning of his ministry in a Nazareth synagogue by challenging the hometown crowd who thought God only worked among the Jews. (Luke 4:24-27)

He used a foreign man as the hero of his famous parable — the good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37)

He told the woman at the well in Samaria, whose religion was different from his own: “The time is coming and now is when true worshippers will worship [not based on their place of worship, but] in Spirit and truth.” (John 4)

When we consider Jesus’ early childhood as a refugee in Egypt, then later as a Galilean who was looked down upon by the Jerusalem elite, such reaching out to those beyond his ethnic group is not surprising. He was an outsider himself.

The Christian faith as we know it today would be little more than a Jewish sect were it not for the work of Paul and other missionaries who broke down the ethnic barriers for any who would follow Jesus.

Phillip was led to an Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:26-40) Peter experienced the Spirit working among non-Jewish followers of Christ. (Acts 10) Paul successfully argued with leaders in

Jerusalem that the Jewish food laws and other common practices did not matter — only faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 15)

These new people called Christians were constantly discovering God's love for all people, not just their own kind. They came to know a God who builds bridges, even when others build walls.

Today, fair-minded Americans can easily find reasons to celebrate those who are new to our land.

For instance, many are essential to our food supply, our construction industry and our medical services. When I spent a night in a local hospital last year, three out of the four nurses caring for me were Latino. Even more, many of us often find that friendship with those from around the world greatly broadens and enriches our minds and spirits.

Yet tribalism seems on the rise in America. Some of our law-abiding, productive neighbors live in fear of deportation, and legal immigration is being greatly restricted.

It is common for some leaders to justify bias against new arrivals as a security issue, since some newcomers commit crimes.

In fact, the Cato Institute reported that incarceration rates among immigrants is only .85 of 1 percent, while it is 1.53 percent among native-born Americans.

Besides, who among us would want to get rid of all Italian-Americans simply because a few of them were members of the Mafia? Crime, after all, is something we handle by enforcing laws, not discriminating against an entire group.

If we worship a peasant man named Jesus who was part of an ethnic group other than our own, we must learn to see all God's children simply as members of the human race which God loves and for whom Christ died.

God still says, "Do not oppress foreigners, for your ancestors were foreigners, too." We can add that, not only do we seek justice for those from other lands, but we also celebrate all the blessings we have because they are here.