



## **Do we love our neighbors as ourselves or do we only love our neighbors who are like ourselves**

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Emma Lazarus' words inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty read: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

These words are not only an invitation to the tempest-tost to come to America; they are also an historical statement about all of the inhabitants of America (only excluding our American Indians). Go to Ancestry.com and we will find that all Americans have come to this new world. Our parents, our grandparents, our great grandparents fled to here hoping to find a new birth for themselves and their children. And they found that new birth. Their children prospered and built this wonderful country in which we live. It is not perfect. We have been guilty of great sins and continue to be guilty, but I cannot think of a better country in which to live. We are a great hodge-podge of people because once the Irish, and the Poles, and Germans and Slovaks and the Mexicans and the Chinese, and etc. became Americans, they intermarried and produced the culture we now share. Today's Americans are transplanted from countries around the world.

But now we have failed as Americans; Meadville certainly has. Several weeks ago a poll was published in the Tribune regarding our acceptance of Syrian refugees into Pennsylvania. Some 65 percent of our friends and neighbors said we should not allow them to come to Pennsylvania. We, this great hodge-podge of Irish, and Italians, and Germans, and Slovaks, we Americans, many of whose grandparents wept when they saw that great statue holding her lamp beside the golden door, said no to the huddled masses, the wretched refuse, the tempest tost of Syria.

Why did we do this? There are many answers, I suppose. But I think that most who said "no" fear Muslims, the very Muslims who are fleeing from their persecutors as many of our forebears fled from our persecutors, religious and political. The decision to say "no" was woefully misguided. Let's look at some statistics:

Alex Nowrasteh, writing for the Cato Institute, observes that "Syrian Refugees Don't Pose a Serious Security Threat."

"Of the 859,629 refugees admitted from 2001 onwards, only three have been convicted of planning terrorist attacks on targets outside of the United States and none was successfully carried out. That is one terrorism-planning conviction for every 286,543 refugees that have been admitted. To put that in perspective, about 1 in every 22,541 Americans committed murder in 2014. The terrorist threat from Syrian refugees in the United States is hyperbolically overexaggerated and we have very little to fear from them because the refugee vetting system is so thorough." Read the complete article at [cato.org](http://cato.org).

Furthermore, Jason L. Riley, writing in the Wall Street Journal in an article entitled "The Mythical Connection Between Immigrants and Crime," observes "that numerous studies going back more than a century have shown that immigrants — regardless of nationality or legal status — are less likely than the native population to commit violent crimes or to be incarcerated." The data show that "for every ethnic group without exception (my emphasis), incarceration rates among young men are lowest for immigrants."

Those are statistics, and I'm sure that you, or Mr. Trump and his ilk, could find or invent statistics to counter what is presented there. But there is another issue — Christianity. I've never lived in an area that has so many Christian churches. In the Dec. 12 Tribune, 139 churches listed their services for the following Sunday. One would think that surely we are mighty Christians who love our neighbors as ourselves. But do we? Or do we only love our neighbors who are like ourselves? Those Syrian refugees are our neighbors. Christian or Muslim, I do not believe it makes any difference. They are "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" and we have denied them our democratic air in which to do that.

The words on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty are only the last four lines of the original poem written by Emma Lazarus. In the first part of the poem she compares the statue to the Colossus of Rhodes, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. She says:

"Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,

"With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

:Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

"A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

"Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name

"Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand

"Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command

"The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"'Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!' cries she with silent lips. 'Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses' ... etc.

Our forebears were given a "world-wide welcome" to this land by that "Mother of Exiles." But now perhaps that "mighty woman" should extinguish her torch and turn down her head in shame.