

**“Border Stories”**

**Matthew 2:13-23**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**July 22, 1018**

Some of you may recall that last winter I had reason to suspect the Washington Post of outright plagiarism. I had announced an Advent sermon series entitled “Worth the Wait” well before the metropolitan newspaper stole that very phrase for its own Sunday headline!

Well...it has happened again! A month ago I informed Hugh that the title of the sermon for today would be “Border Stories”. And what does the Post feature in last week’s Sunday magazine?: “Border Stories”!

Of course, one ancient ‘border story’ is central to our own tradition, and it is told in Chapter Two of the Gospel of Matthew (page 3 of the NT in the pew Bibles):

READ MATTHEW 2: 13-23

**Notice: A political authority is paranoid. A family flees life-threatening danger. A child is the heart of the story. A woman cries for her children. The family crosses borders in search of new life.**

For 36 years, from 1960 to 1996, civil war engulfed Guatemala, destabilizing all of Central America. Rampant violations of human rights and unspeakable atrocities forced many thousands of indigenous Guatemalans to seek safety across the border in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Poor Mexican farmers, themselves scratching out a living on parched land, allowed their Guatemalan brothers and sisters to hide deep in the jungles of the terrain. Samuel Ruiz, the Roman Catholic Bishop of the region, marshalled the resources of the church to befriend and assist the refugees. Twice in the 1980’s I participated in delegations of supportive American clergy and laity, meeting with and bringing

aid to the Guatemalan families living in the secluded forests of Chiapas. I walked with young children to replenish the makeshift village's daily water supplies at a spring miles away. I listened to the stories of fear and desperation told by the village leaders, who extended an invitation that I have never forgotten: "And when we return to our homes in Guatemala, we want you to walk with us." They did; I didn't.

The irony is that during the decades of that civil war, my own US administrations, military, and CIA were complicit in the death or disappearance of hundreds of thousands of innocent Guatemalan children, women, and men. Of this, official documents declassified for public review, now testify. The irony is that Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who was shunned by the Pope and the Vatican because of his "subversive" humanitarian work with the poor, accepted my invitation to tell this "border story" to congregations throughout Illinois, and was a guest in our home. The irony is that Armando, a handy man who gladly takes on projects at our home today, is a veteran of that civil war, on which side I do not know, harboring actions in his mind of which he does not speak, raising a family of contributing American citizens.

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While the Guatemalan civil war raged a generation ago, allow me to share a current "border story", in the words of Rev. Feliberto Pereira, founder and executive director of Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries. At the US/Mexico border, the agency is a partner of our denomination's Global Ministries. Rev. Pereira suffered torture as a political prisoner himself.

*Most of the people we serve have come fleeing for their lives. The situation in Central America now and for many years is that poverty and wars cause broken relationships and broken families. This causes turning to drugs, gangs, cartels, and a general violence in communities to escape the pain. Few are spared, but some come under intensely cruel violence, torture. The governments are unable to*

*control this, and sometimes they are in collusion with the gangs and cartels. Parents are driven to either watch their children starve or be tortured, or seek a better life in the US with or without their children. Parents are compelled to escape with the clothes on their backs and the child they love. Virtually all the women we see have been raped or molested in their home village. The same has happened to many of the men. Almost every single person has been tortured, sometimes by the gangs and the police or army, and again as they drove on to get to the US border to apply for asylum. Scars—physical, mental, and spiritual—abound. As Disciples of Christ, Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries belongs to a Christian tradition which is committed to using our hearts, our heads, and our bodies to answer God’s call to justice.*

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The ‘border stories’ told recently in the Post’s Sunday Magazine start in McAllen, Texas, and only reconfirm the stories already heard this morning. I am familiar with crossing the Rio Grande River at McAllen, with vans full of American teens befriending and helping a hundred Mexican kids at Children’s Haven International, an orphanage a few miles south of Reynosa.

But of course we know that heart-wrenching “border stories” are being lived as we worship this morning on the border between Syria and Turkey...on the border between the Ukraine and Crimea...on the border between North Korea and South Korea...on the border between Pakistan and India...on the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh...on the internal borders of Europe. According to the refugee agency of the United Nations, 70 million people world-wide are the subjects of those stories.

The Parliament of the World’s Religions, a global dialogue of faiths meeting regularly since its founding in 1893, has this to say about the abuse and violence that marks the current crisis:

*“Silence and inaction equate to complicity...When a nation claims the mantle of self-evident truths ‘under God’, it bears a special responsibility to act in accordance with these truths under divine precept. And when a nation is made up of a multitude of families, each with their religious traditions, philosophies, and ethical beliefs, that nation bears a further responsibility to uphold the freedoms that families require to flourish...The fracture of vulnerable refugee families (is) an abject failure of civilized and collective life...a failure to understand sacred texts that call for the protection of the neighbor, a failure to regard the physical and mental health of children and parents, and a colossal failure of the heart.”*

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