

According to Mark . . . July and August 2018

Most of us over the age of 40 remember watching Sesame Street on a regular basis (back when there were only 5-6 channels on TV, and PBS was the publicly funded source of educational programming). The thing I loved about Sesame Street was that they did lots of singing. If you were in our church this Spring, you might have heard my own version of "Rubber Ducky" that we all sang on Baptism Sunday. As a boy I loved that song soooooo much that I saved up all the money I earned making my bed and taking out the garbage to buy that 45 rpm single by Bert and Ernie. Yes, it was that popular that they actually cut a single and it was available in rural Colorado. The Sesame Street gang also sang another song, some of the words of which go like this:

"Oh, who are the people in your neighborhood...in your neighborhood...in your neighborhood? They're the people that you meet, when you're walkin' down the street, they're the people that you meet, each daaaaaaayyy..."

Now, the Sesame Street gang back then sang about the mailman, the postman, the fireman, and police as the folks you meet. But nowadays they might sing about the homeless person, the parent working 2-3 jobs to provide for their families, or the immigrant picking up jobs no one else wants to do in order to get established, provide a home, and start to bring their families to America for a better life.

This summer we will be consumed with stories from our southern border states with Mexico about the current (and ever shifting, it seems) state of how we treat folks who flee violence from their homelands and seek a better life. Political commentators will try to make this a Republican or Democrat issue, a law and order or lawlessness issue, or any number of ways that seek to simplify or vilify a very human story that has been going on for centuries, and maybe with our own families in our own family trees.

My relatives fled the civil wars of the Germanic States of 1846-48 by gathering up all they had, and along with 12 families, sailed on a 50 foot boat across the Atlantic. They should not have survived that trip on such a small craft against the ocean. And before the days of any kind of immigration system, they were not 'welcomed' by any means - new immigrants faced discrimination in the cities (Boston was famous for "Irish Need Not Apply" during this time) and because my family had no one they knew here, they were banished to the frontier at that time, which was North-central Iowa, Northern Illinois, and Wisconsin. They were given a small tract of land from the railroads and told to make it in a new town along the rail line. They stayed and five of nine kids survived and made it.

But if they were immigrating today, poor farmers without skills, they might be told "no more Fresians". And certainly too many kids...nine? Perhaps the kids would be pulled from them while the parents went through an immigration system they didn't understand because of cultural and language barriers. Each day they wonder are their children OK, who's taking care of them, who is schooling them, are they even together? Perhaps most draconian of all, the parents could be deported while the kids remained here in the US in foster care with people they didn't know and who could not speak lowland German.

The Bible informs us on how to treat immigrants. If we are truly living as Jesus' disciples, we would know these things about keeping God's promises:

"When a foreigner resides with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You must treat the foreigner living among you as native-born and love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God...." (Leviticus 19:34-35).

"You must not exploit or oppress a foreign resident, for you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You must not mistreat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to Me in distress, I will surely hear their cry...." (Exodus 22:21-23).

[Jesus said] "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another..." (John 13:34-35).

It's amazing how God's voice can still the shrill voices of both MSNBC and Fox. We would be well-served to remember this summer how living Biblically and remembering our own family stories can help us not only survive this time of division in our political discourse, but actually help heal if we change our hearts and the dialogue around ANY issue. Change it to neighborliness. Mercy. Understanding. Kindness. Justice. Mercy. And above all, humility and LOVE.

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Come see me sometime during July and August, I'm usually in on Wednesdays. Let's talk to God together.

Pastor Mark