

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

“They’re Coming”

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Psalm 72; Matthew 18:1-6

They’re coming. They’re coming and you should be afraid. That’s what the flyers said. The flyers had been distributed in a white’s only neighborhood in Detroit. They’re coming, the flyers said. The blacks are coming. They are buying into your neighborhood and unless you want to see your home values fall dramatically and you have to live next to a black family, you better sell now. You better be afraid. And at the bottom of the flyer was the number for a local real estate agent, who would pay cash for your house. This was not the only way that real estate speculators got white families to be gripped with fear so that they would sell their homes. They would also hire black couples to walk up and down streets, stopping to look at homes that were for sale. Then the speculators would begin phone campaigns to spread the rumors of blacks moving into the neighborhoods. They were coming, the rumor would go, and so you needed to be afraid and sell.

They’re coming. They’re coming and we need to be afraid. This is what America has always done. They’re coming and we need to be afraid. The Baptists are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. The Catholics are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. The Irish are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. The Italians are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. The Chinese are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. The Japanese are coming so we need to be afraid because they are...and you fill in the blank. We need to be so afraid of them that we should not let them live in our neighborhoods, go to our country clubs, go to our schools, date our children or perhaps even be allowed to stay. We need to pass laws against them. We need to lock them up. They are coming and we need to be afraid.

They’re coming. They’re coming and we need to be afraid. We need be afraid of those people coming from Mexico and Central America. We need to be afraid because they are...and here is the language we are hearing today.... murderers, rapists, invaders, criminals, job takers and an infestation. We need to be afraid because those mothers and their children escaping gangs, those fathers desperate to provide for their families, those young teens not wanting to be killed by or pressed into membership in gangs are coming. We need to be afraid of them. We need to be afraid of them so much that we needed to take away children as young as eight-months old from their parents...and then ship them to Michigan or New York where they are cannot speak with each other. We need to be so afraid that rather than giving them hearings to see if they might qualify under our laws for asylum, we have to lock them up and charge them as criminals. They’re coming and we need to be afraid.

Now, before I go one, I want to admit something to you. I don’t know what the answer to the immigration issue is. While I may have some ideas, I know that we cannot simply open the door and say ya’ll come. I don’t know how to fix the system of who we let in and who we don’t. What that means is that I am not choosing the platforms of any particular political party...but then what we are watching is that

neither party seems to know what to do either. So that is something that I do not know. But my friends, there are two things that I do know.

The first thing I know is how Jesus felt about children. In the first century children were considered a burden until they were old enough to work in the shop or in the fields. There was no child-centric ethos. Children were not to be seen or heard. So, it was a stunning turnaround when the disciples wanted to know who was greatest in the Kingdom of heaven, and Jesus, rather than choosing some super-righteous Pharisee, chose a child. He declared in fact that all of us were to be as humble as children and not only that, anyone who put a stumbling block in front of a child, meaning to do something to a child that keeps them from fully living into their becoming full children of a gracious God, should simply fasten a millstone around their necks and go and drown themselves. And we need not stop here. Not only did Jesus welcome children, he welcomed all of those of whom people hated or were afraid; lepers, women with a flow of blood, tax collectors, sinners and even Roman centurions. Jesus refused to be afraid. He saw every human being as a child of God and challenged those around him to do the same.

The second thing I know is how a righteous leader is supposed to act...and let me say again, this is a non-partisan theological reflection. Each of you can do with it what you will. We see this in Psalm 72. Listen again. *“May he judge your people with righteousness...meaning as God would do. May he bring justice to the poor. May he defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor...for he delivers the needy when they call, the poor, and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of them. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life...”* My friends this is what a Godly leader is supposed to look like. These are the things that Godly leaders are supposed to do. They are supposed to do them because this is what God does. God frees the captives. God cares for the least. God watches over the widows and the orphans. God’s leaders then are to be God’s regents on earth imitating their God in heaven.

So where does this leave us. It leaves us with struggling to find a balance between keeping our nation safe by insuring that real criminals are kept out, while those who need a refuge are allowed in. It leaves us trying to find a balance between insuring that our children are safe and that the children coming to our borders are safely cared for with their parents and not separated and sent to shelters far from home. What I want to do then is to offer you a series of challenges.

First, I challenge you to pray for those coming to our country; that they arrive safely and are treated with the respect due to children of God. Second, I challenge you to pray for those who are tasked with enforcing our immigration laws. They are under a great deal of stress as they are often conflicted with having to enforce laws they do not believe in. Third I challenge you to pray for and to contact your legislators, charging them with creating a fair and compassionate immigration system. Finally I invite you to come to Knox Hall and watch a video called, the Genesis of the Exodus (www.thegenesisoftheexodusfilm.org) which will help you understand who the refugees are and why they are coming. Those are my challenges to you for this week and I hope and pray that together, we can show the love of God in Jesus Christ, to all who seek to find and new and better life.