

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson
St. John's Episcopal Church
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Epiphany II B (John 1:43-51)

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

It might seem too facile to relate this comment by Nathaniel to the latest, most scandalous comments coming from Washington, D.C. But because those comments reflect upon all of us – who we are, what we believe, what values we hold dear – I think it is important to take this comment of Nathaniel’s as a stepping stone toward a deeper understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

The Book of Genesis tells us that we are made in the image of God. That’s *all* of us. No exceptions. No matter whether you come from Nazareth, Namibia, Norway, or Haiti: made in the image of God.

The Old Testament tells us to welcome the stranger, to care for the alien among us, to shelter and feed the foreigner. Jesus directs us to love those who are different – the traveler by the side of the road who was ignored by the priests who passed by and cared for by a Samaritan. An outsider.

“And the second commandment is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Who is my neighbor?”

Who is this neighbor we’re supposed to love?

My neighbor is Mexican. My neighbor is Nigerian. My neighbor is from London and Dakar and Beijing and Los Angeles.

And my neighbor is made in the image of God.

There has been so much fear of our neighbor generated by politicians in the past few years – so much fear of those among us who may not be white, who may not be Christian, who may, indeed, be of color or worship God differently. That encouragement to be very afraid of those who are different from the majority has got to stop. It has got to stop.

Because that black woman from Somalia who happens to worship Allah is made in the image of God.

Because that twelve-year-old black child from Haiti who was trafficked out of an orphanage is made in the image of God.

That family fleeing gang violence in El Salvador... made in the image of God.

What’s not to understand???

Where is the compassion of our so-called Christian politicians?!?

Oh. Right. That woman, that child, that family... they’re not quite... white enough.

I'm not going to get into an argument over the pros and cons of a wall along our southern border except to say this: That the vast majority of undocumented immigrants in this country came here legally – by plane, by boat, by bus. A wall wouldn't have stopped them because they entered legally. That they overstayed their visa is a totally different issue with a complex set of challenges.

And now we're getting ready to rip families and communities apart by sending *back* to El Salvador people we *welcomed*. People who have jobs, paid taxes, children who have been educated and know no other home (and, if they were born here, are American citizens).

But... they're not very white, are they.

My faith informs my politics. And my faith tells me that we should welcome *more* refugees who are fleeing violence or poverty or oppression you and I have never, ever experienced. We should welcome *more* of these people, made in the image of God, not fewer. Even if they're not very white.

We must remember: Unless we are First Nation people, we are all immigrants. You are an immigrant. I am an immigrant. Some of us date back to a family that was immigrated illegally. But that doesn't seem to make much difference... if we're white.

And then, of course, there are the millions of *black* people who were brought here legally and immorally.

“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Lev. 19:34)

We must be very, very critical when we hear self-proclaimed Christians proclaim the godliness of our representatives. We must be very, very critical when we hear self-proclaimed Christians proclaim a protectionist stance against immigration – “They take American jobs” – I say nonsense: Many of our immigrants take jobs that Americans – white Americans – won't take. We must be very, very critical when we hear the silence of self-proclaimed Christians – a silent complacency toward racism and racially-charged comments. I find it quite baffling. And embarrassing, for I proclaim myself Christian.

No wonder so many people hold us at arm's length.

But I have hope.

I have hope that goodness will prevail. I have hope that compassion will come forth. I have hope that people of conscience will speak up and take action.

And I have hope: That the mercy of God will protect us all. And that we will be forgiven.

Amen.