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St. John's Episcopal Church  
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Pentecost IV (Proper 6B,

"It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." (Jesus – Luke 17:2)

My heart is broken. My stomach churns. My mind is bewildered: That in this country, in 2018, hundreds of children are being taken from their parents, frequently under false pretenses like "we're just taking you down the hall for a photo," and placed in enormous warehouses like the Walmart in Brownsville, Texas, where nearly fifteen hundred boys now spend their days and their nights behind chain-link fencing.

And it is *sickening* that our legislators are silent.

*They are complicit in an act of barbaric cruelty.*

How can this be?

God said this: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 22:21)

*This, my people, is Biblical.*

And God said, "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:19)

*This, my people, is Biblical.*

Substitute "America" for Egypt. How can we forget that we, too, if we are white, were once aliens, strangers, immigrants? *How can we forget this?* How can we forget that we, too, if we are white and have been here for more than a few generations, we, too, were complicit in ripping apart the families of people of color. Known as slaves. Complicit in breaking up families by sending First Nation children to boarding schools to "Americanize" them. Tearing apart the families of Japanese-American *citizens* and placing them in, really, concentration camps.

And God said, "You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice." (Deuteronomy 24:17)

Is it justice to criminalize people who seek asylum? No, it is not. By all international conventions and codes – and by all that is moral and just – an asylum seeker is not a criminal. And in denying asylum seekers justice we further criminalize a non-criminal act by tearing their families apart at our borders.

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

And we, my people, we who are white, were foreigners in the land of America.

"Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness... and do no wrong or violence to the alien..." (Jeremiah 22:3)

*This, my people, is Biblical. Hear it again: "Act with justice and righteousness...and do no wrong or violence to the alien."*

Any child psychologist – any parent, for that matter, any teacher, any caregiver, any pediatrician, anyone with a heart – can tell you that ripping a five-year old from the arms of his mother is cruel injustice and unjust cruelty.

*This is the policy of our current government. This is the policy of our current so-called Justice Department. This is the policy of our current so-called Attorney General.*

*And he has the gall to call it Biblical! And a representative of the Chief Executive calls it Biblical!*

*It.Is.Not.Biblical!*

*There is no law that states that asylum seekers are criminals.*

*There is no law that states that the children of asylum seekers should be taken from the arms of their parents.*

*And there certainly is no law that states that the enforcement of laws which do not exist is Biblical!*

*Stop using this Holy Book, this long love story between God and humankind, to justify this immoral policy!*

And Mr. Sessions, if you want to quote Saint Paul, you might consider this verse: "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers." (Romans 12:13)

You might also consider this: "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

Is this not Biblical? That we should love one another? That we should love our neighbor? That we should care for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and those who live in constant fear? Aren't those values ingrained in our national heart?

It appears not.

John Kelly, the White House chief of staff, offered an explanation: that separating children from their parents could be a "tough deterrent" toward people seeking sanctuary. (May 18, 2018, interview with NPR's John Burnett)

That, my people, is not Biblical. It is heartless.

This is not about crime or security, it is about mercy, about justice, about our own sense of humanity – who we are as Americans.

Most asylum seekers have no legal protection nor any guarantee of legal representation. Most do not know their rights; most do not speak English. So... a ten-year old fleeing gang violence must deal *on her own* with this harsh system which has already taken her from her mother and

placed her in a detention camp. Mr. Kelly said, "Well, they'll be put into foster care or whatever."

*Or whatever?!? Is this Biblical?!?*

No, it is not.

It is callous and it is mean and it is unchristian, unbuddhist, unmuslim,unjewish, inhuman and inhumane.

And it must stop.

We must call out those who claim Biblical justification for this monstrous policy.

We must call out those who claim Biblical justification for following a law *which does not exist.*

And we must call out those who represent us but remain silent – or, worse, who bend their knee to sin.

Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins... imagine this.

For some reason a paramilitary gang is coming after you and your family. Because you're liberal, or because you're a person of color, or because you're gay, or because you've participated in a protest march, because you won't participate in smuggling drugs.

You leave your home, your friends, your work to flee for safety. Your child, your grandchild, your niece or nephew has been targeted as well, so you escape with them. You get to a border – say, up north, seeking asylum. Officials detain you and *take your crying child from your arms and you have no idea where your child will be tomorrow.*

Is your heart broken?

*Of course it is.*

Is your child afraid?

*Of course she is.*

And then someone opens their heart and their arms and says, "Welcome. You are safe. We have your child. Here."

Would that not be a sign of mercy? Would that not be Biblical?

What, indeed, would Jesus do right now.

I believe he would cry out at the injustice of this horrible, horrible policy and demand change.

He would at least say, "*Do not do this in my name, for that is blasphemy. That is sin.*"

Right now, I believe he weeps.

Amen.