

No one should be excluded

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It's been a while since my elementary school days when the preparation for Valentine's Day was filled with difficult decisions like which box of Valentines to buy and determining who in my class would get which card. While I remember facing these challenging decisions every time Valentine's Day came around, there was one decision I knew was not mine to make. Each year my teacher made it clear that you couldn't leave anyone out. Everyone in class, even the one you never sat with at lunch or played with at recess, needed to get a Valentine from you. Though there were times when I wished this injunction would be lifted, including everyone always ended up feeling like the right thing to do.

Though I'm now long past those days of searching for the coolest box of Valentine cards at the store, I recently had the opportunity to try my hand with Valentine's Day cards again. Last weekend I was grateful to attend an event called *To: Immigrants with Love*. This gathering drew together community members from across different segments of Greeley to make Valentine's Cards to send to our immigrant neighbors currently being held at the Immigrant Detention Facility in Aurora.

Sadly, I suspect expressions of care and concern are not what our neighbors held in immigration detention have come to expect. Today the topic of immigration is among the most polarizing political issues in our country. Consequently, expressing support for our immigrant neighbors may be among the fastest ways to get defriended on Facebook and to collect comments at the end of a Faith Column.

While neither of those things is particularly pleasant, the discomfort experienced by those who stand in solidarity with immigrants pales in comparison with the hardships and suffering faced by immigrants who have come to our community with the hope of a better future for themselves and their families. More often than not, the harrowing stories of immigrants fleeing violence and poverty are covered up by sound bites that seek to stoke fear and obscure the humanity of these neighbors.

Additionally, select verses of the Bible like Romans 13 are employed to claim that Christians cannot oppose any law enacted by their government because "there is no authority except from God." While this may seem to many like the proper understanding of this passage at the present, it should at least give pause that those who today claim that this is the clear meaning of Romans 13 did not argue for the same application of this verse during the previous administration.

Moreover, the issue of immigration is not the first time Romans 13 has been used in our country to discourage people from challenging laws that they deemed unjust and inhumane. Supporters of the Civil Rights Movement, the Suffragist Movement, and the Abolitionist Movement all heard similar arguments made against their efforts. Few people today would argue that supporters of these movements were working against the will of God. I trust the same will eventually hold true for those in our country currently supporting our immigrant neighbors.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.”

While it isn't the most popular sentiment to hold today, my concern and care for immigrants is not assuaged by sound bites or attenuated by references to Romans 13. I pray for the day when our country's immigration policies will reflect a heart for the the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free. But I am not going to wait to be told when it is permissible to have care and concern for my immigrant neighbors.

Just as my teachers in elementary school made it clear that no one was to be excluded from receiving a Valentine, I am convinced that Jesus, the one I confess as teacher and Lord, calls me to extend love to my neighbors, without exception.