

By the church's rendering of time, it was six years ago today on the Third Sunday After the Epiphany in 2020 when I preached about meeting ICE for the first time. It was a mild encounter, slow and oppressive with no teargas or beating. Just a handful of agents on the driveway, a family hiding inside, and a community gathered to serve humanity. That family came to love us and what many in our congregation did for them and still do. That family was deported last year, child citizens and all. My, how things've changed.

We're so worried about ICE that emergency announcements about this weekend's storm were cautioned not to say the word "ice" because that might confuse people into fearing for immigration raids. You guys, y'all, yins, that's absurd. We can't describe one of the greatest dangers this storm brings because of the incredibly violent and frightening mission terrorizing normal people. That's as damning a statement about the tactics of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement as I've heard yet. We can't even talk about the weather.

ICE is more active and more militarized than ever before; human targets are more afraid and less obvious. No one really knows if they're in ICE's sights, and not everyone taken by ICE was in their sights to begin with. The proportion of innocents taken over the past year is appalling. Only 5% of ICE detainees have violent criminal records. At one point, 70% of detainees had no criminal convictions, and in some places, as few as 3% had any criminal record at all. That might be a backwards way of looking at this. 70% with no convictions, 95% with no violent record, and in some places, as many as 97% with no record at all.

One of the most appalling aspects of the manner in which these things are being done is how reality ends up sitting kinda right next to what Jesus taught, "just out of phase" as Doctor Who would describe it. Jesus told his disciples to cast their nets and fish for people. Catch as many as you can with love and kindness and hope! Teach them the Gospel, show them the peace of God, feed the sheep, tend to the sick, visit the imprisoned (guilty or not, for what it's worth). ICE is also fishing for people, and they cast as broad a net as Andrew and Peter, but what they do with their catch couldn't be more different. Catch as many as you can with cruelty and anger and fear! Reports from inside American concentration camps tell of detainees forced to eat on their knees with hands bound behind their backs. ICE has stopped paying healthcare providers that tended to the sick. Even those with the constitutional authority to visit the imprisoned are turned away at the gates. See what I mean? It almost feels intentionally blasphemous. They're so close yet so very far from what Jesus would have them do. And that is nothing less than a perversion of the faith. Jesus didn't want us fishing for people to torture them. He wanted us fishing for people to care for them. In case you're wondering what being Christlike looks like, a story recently emerged of 2 women detained by ICE who, while being taken to an impromptu holding center in Minneapolis, administered first aid to an ICE agent having a seizure. My Lord, that's an incredible, almost impossible witness to Christ's love. Where would Jesus stand? I wonder.

The Psalmist pleads with God: "hide not your face from me." We can ask God to show us the divine face, but ICE continues to hide their faces under the auspices of necessary anonymity, an anomaly in both law enforcement and federal employment. See, every other law enforcement agent in the nation is required to have their name and badge number visible, and every other federal employee's name, position, and salary is public record. We can beg to see God's face, but ICE's remain sacrosanct.

Look at the fish these faceless terrorizers caught last week. An old man in his boxers supposedly mistaken for someone already imprisoned elsewhere. A ten-year old, a five-year old, a two-year old -- one of them used as bait to catch a parent. But don't worry, the Border Patrol chief said, "we are experts at dealing with children." Take a step back for a moment. First, why would an agency supposedly going after the worst criminals consider themselves experts at dealing with children? And second, ICE is an arm of the current

administration. Consider the administration's record of "dealing with children." Roughly 99% of the Epstein Files continue to be hidden from public view. The US Justice Department significantly cut programs combatting child sex trafficking. The US hamstrung efforts to prevent international child sex trafficking. Perhaps they *are* experts at dealing with children.

Now, I know some will write off what I say on account of being "too political" or bad interpretations of scripture or liberalism disguised as Christianity. I get that. So, consider instead the over 100 clergy arrested in Minneapolis while kneeling and reciting the Lord's Prayer in protest. Or consider the bishop of New Hampshire's instructions to his clergy to get their affairs in order and update their wills to prepare for a time of new martyrdom. Or consider the Presiding Bishop's direction to be "an engine of resistance." We're no Jesus, and we shouldn't seek out danger, but our baptismal vows to join him in his death and resurrection mean we've committed to stand where he would've. Be honest with yourselves and consider where Jesus would stand. Take any one of the horrendous moments of the past week and imagine Jesus in the picture. Where would he stand? Is he with the ones shooting a man on his knees multiple times, or is he with the ones being taken or killed? Before you answer, remember that when armed forces came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and one of his followers lopped off a guard's ear, Jesus made him stop, put the sword away, and healed the injured man.

I want to turn our attention, yet again, to one of those old prophets. Isaiah says the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; God increased their joy; the yoke of burden, the rod of the oppressor was broken. Look, we haven't gotten to the broken yoke just yet. While the great storm blows, it's hard to remember light. But we know it's there on the other side of the clouds. We know there's still joy to be found. We know our calling to be as clear as the coldest winter day. We know joy is an act of resistance in and of itself. It can be hard to find joy, but it's there, even if only in the hope that one day this'll all be finished and seen for the awful reality it truly is. There will come a time when no one will admit to supporting these atrocities. Would that everyone was already against them. But we're not there yet. Our work now is to resist where we can, seek joy where we can, serve who we can, and brace ourselves for the moments we're called into joyful, purposeful, peaceful resistance. Because *that's* where Jesus would stand.