

I just got a puppy. She's precious and goofy and sometimes loud. I've got pictures, probably too many, and because of her I'm spending more time moving around outside. Great, right? I want y'all to imagine a conversation where I describe that puppy and someone says, "So what do you have against cats?" It's ridiculous, right? I like lemon squares, but that doesn't mean I don't like brownies. I like rainy days, but that doesn't mean I hate clear skies. I love my wife, but that doesn't mean I dislike everyone else. I don't like it one bit, but we see this all the time. Need-based financial aid isn't an insult to wealthy families, senior housing isn't a dig against young people, "taxing the wealthy" doesn't mean no one else gets taxed, feminism isn't anti-man, "Palestine should be left alone" doesn't mean Israel should be destroyed, "the US shouldn't be bombing Iran" doesn't mean Iran is morally good, saying our nation has problems isn't anti-America, respecting due process doesn't mean letting criminals run rampant.

That kind of argument's my current pet peeve. Remember "Black Lives Matter?" No part of that statement meant white lives didn't matter or black lives mattered more than others. All it was trying to do was remind this nation that black people should be included when considering who should be treated right. And it was trying to shine light on a hard truth: that, no matter how much one claims "all lives matter," the lived reality doesn't bear that out. Black Lives Matter described a reality that hasn't arrived yet. We need to make the world reflect that, and to get there we gotta focus on where the problem is.

It's the same thing with Pride Month. It's a reactionary swing in a culture that targets members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Pride Month exists because so much of our culture continues to frame queer identities as shameful. It doesn't mean straight people don't matter. It means queer people should matter as much as anyone else. I know some think we're overrun with queer people trying to push their ways on everyone else. I can tell ya, the Gay Agenda is pretty basic. It's to have the same rights as everyone else, the same protections, the same freedoms, the same options. Ultimately, that spooky Gay Agenda is to no longer be the topic of other people's debates. And yet, there's a need for particular attention as a sitting US Representative just said that "homosexuality has no place in America." Several states, including my home state, have instituted alternatives to Pride Month with critiques implicit in their names: Fidelity Month, Family Month, Nuclear Family Month, Strong Families Month. During the current legislative session, 491 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills've been introduced in state legislatures across the US. The president claimed 6 states are taking our children and performing "transgender mutilation" on them. That's why Pride Month's needed. Not because other people don't matter but because some groups aren't treated like they do matter.

Jesus just told the Disciples to go out and spread the Good News. He said, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel does not mean Jesus doesn't care about Gentiles or Samaritans. It means that's not what he's sending those particular people out to do at that particular moment. In his mind, the lost sheep of the house of Israel needed particular attention. In the Bible, immigrants, foreigners, and "aliens in a strange land" repeatedly get singled out as the kind of people that need help. Not that other people don't need help, mind you, but they particularly need help. Y'all know that's how things are going now, too. Even legal forms of immigration and citizenship no longer provide reliable protection. There are so many stories underscoring that reality, but stories can be discounted, I suppose, on account of immigrants having an agenda. To be clear, that agenda, if there is one, is similar to the Gay Agenda. They want fair and just treatment and, mostly, to be left alone.

But, since stories could be discarded, let's run through a handful of simple, verifiable, Google-able facts. Aliens.gov is a brand new government website with a black background spotted with stars and supernatural green writing comparing immigrants to extraterrestrial beings that nefariously, and I quote, "walk among us." All 6,000 refugees received by the United States this year are white people from South Africa. Since January of 2025, ICE has detained 500 babies and toddlers. Immigration courts are so flooded with cases that mass hearings've begun; the worst instance I've found put 73 people on trial in 30 minutes -- that's less than 25 seconds for each human being to plead their case. Text messages from ICE agents provide a glimpse inside "gross" detention facilities. The spaces are severely overcrowded, though "not as crowded as a subway car," one said. "This is insane" another said while cases of TB, monkeypox, seizures, and simply "cardiac" went untreated. One man's death in a detention center was ruled a homicide but all evidence from what's supposed to be an immensely secure facility has disappeared. In another detention center, the government's own Department of Homeland Security reported horrendous treatment of detainees by guards, including an agent stabbing a detainee with a pen. The group who runs the for-profit federal detention centers sued Colorado to stop health and safety inspections. Protestors outside the New Jersey facility face escalating tactics while restricted to so-called "free speech zones." And all this is done at the behest of an administration the Vice President of which said, when challenged on the claim that immigrants in Ohio were eating cats and dogs, "If I have to create stories...that's what I'm going to do."

18 people detained by ICE have died this year, the fastest accumulation of death since ICE's inception. But does all this argument against the administration or ICE OR in favor of treating immigrants well mean we should treat non-immigrants poorly? Well, no. 3 ICE agents have been killed by a person since ICE was created in 2003. 3 of 'em. One was killed in a random encounter by an escaped convict from the United States; one was killed while in Mexico by a cartel who mistook him for a member of another cartel; and the other was killed when he accidentally discharged his own firearm. The leading cause of death for ICE agents is COVID-19, and the second is cancer associated with 9/11.

Y'all, arguing for the humane treatment of immigrants or queer folks or black people is not arguing against the humane treatment of anyone else, but it is arguing for improvements in humane treatment to be targeted where they're needed most. That doesn't have to mean smaller pieces of the pie for everyone, either, but while a scarcity mindset doesn't have to be so, sometimes resources are limited. So then what? Well, the Bible lays out other people as its priority. Abraham was hospitable in a way that affected him. With the help of Sarah and a servant, he fed those total strangers staples made of the best ingredients and the choicest meat from his herd, tender and good. Yes he prioritized the strangers, and yes, in that case, the best food went to others when it could've gone to his own family. But that's what Biblical service to others looks like. That's the Christian Agenda. There's not a debate there. You help people who need help, and you help them by giving 'em the best you've got, not the dregs or the expired can of cream of oyster soup in the back of your pantry or the worn-out pair of shoes you'd never be caught dead wearing again. You give them the best.

In that Collect, we prayed that God's grace will empower us to "proclaim truth with boldness and minister God's justice with compassion." It doesn't ask us to put a bunch of caveats out there so people know we want to help those who need help without harming anyone else. That should go without saying, but apparently it does need saying. Treat everyone like a human being, but know that that requires different things for different people, and sometimes more things for some.

Help those who need it the most; stand ready to help anyone, but know that some folks simply need more than others. Yes, resources can be (but again, don't have to be) limited. So do some triage. Determine who needs us the most, and that's where we go. Not because we don't care about others, but because we do care

about the ones no one else counts among the deserving, the visible, or the truly human. Because *that's* the Christian Agenda.