

## **Knock! Knock!**



***Scripture:***

**James 3:13 to 4:3, 7-8a**

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup>For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

4:1 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

<sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

**Mark 9:30-37**

<sup>30</sup>They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup>for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup>Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” <sup>34</sup>But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” <sup>36</sup>Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



**KNOCK, KNOCK!**

Knock, knock! (Who's there?) Boo! (Boo hoo?) Don't cry, it's okay! Have you heard that joke before? Well the boo hoo isn't really a joke because in reality, the others on the opposite side of the door are crying. And it is not okay!

Knock, knock! (Who's there?) A refugee. (A refugee who?)

A ten year old boy child refugee from Mexico, who will be drafted into the drug cartel's murderous rebel army if he doesn't make it to relatives in the United States.

Knock, knock! (Who's there?) A frail elderly woman, whose home has been burned down and whose goats and sheep have been destroyed, not from the Valley fire, but from bombs sent by ISIS to capture the holy city of Damascus in Syria. Will you let her in?

Knock, knock! (Who's there?) Families, older couples, single disabled women, who were burned out of their homes in the Valley fire in Middletown. Will you let them in?

Knock, knock! (Who's there?) An African American woman who is accustomed to dealing with prejudicial judgments against her because she is: full-figured, gay, female and over fifty. Will you let her in?

Why should we let them in?

### **CHRIST'S CONCERN FOR ALL**

James, in our first scripture reading, was reflecting on what Jesus said about our innate craving to be first, before others. And Jesus, according to Mark, confronted his disciples on their journey to Capernaum about trying to be first and create a hierarchy among the disciples.

**To illustrate how to be humble and hospitable, Jesus sat a child on his lap and said that they should be more concerned about being servants and to welcome all the children as if each one is Jesus himself.**

How does this apply to today's refugee crisis? According to the United Nations convention on the status of refugees, a refugee is someone who has fled his or her country "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve their lives. Refugees are

forced to flee to save their lives or preserve their freedom.

### **LIVE AUTHENTICALLY**

Dr. Cari Jackson addressed Christ's concern for us all to be welcoming and humble, in one of her sermons that she gave at the Festival of Homiletics that I attended in Denver last summer. Although she is a famous preacher, teacher, and author, she describes herself as a black, gay, female, full-figured preacher.

Dr. Jackson preached three times in the five days of the homiletics festival and each time when she concluded her sermon, she received a standing ovation from a room full of preachers from all over the United States and Canada.

Reverend Jackson's greatest passion is to help people discover and live their authentic selves. This passion is shaped by her strong belief that as people live authentically, they are better family members, friends, workers, citizens, and leaders.

### **SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS**

Dr. Jackson has been studying the current Syrian refugee crisis. She believes this crisis gives us the opportunity to see God in the refugees.

This is in harmony with what James and Jesus were teaching in today's scriptures. Dr. Jackson says: Since 2011, more than two-hundred-thousand Syrians died in the civil war. Close to twelve million, one-half of the Syrian population, have been forced from their homes. More than four million have fled.

What began as an act of civil protest has continued to expand to civil war, genocide, and mass exodus. Historically this conflict began as a protest in response to the arrest and torture of teenagers who wrote revolutionary slogans on a school wall. Isis and other extreme groups have taken advantage of the unrest in Syria.

"Globally, one in every one-hundred-twenty-two humans is now either a refugee or seeking asylum" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Across the world, there are an estimated sixty million people displaced from their homes due to war and persecution. This is the world's highest displacement of people in history. But once they leave the violence in their homelands they often become targets for robbery, human trafficking, and mistreatment from border guards. Followers of Jesus must not ignore this international crisis affecting all of God's children.

### **WE MUST BE WELCOMING**

As Jesus and his disciples were traveling through one town after another, his disciples debated who

among them would be the greatest and have the most important position when Jesus came into his kingdom. Jesus responded, "'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'" (Mark 9: 35b-37, NIV)

**Dr. Cari Jackson believes that when Christ taught his disciples to be welcoming he did not mean to merely receive others by opening a door, but to receive them with gladness and delight, especially in response to a need. Like saying, "I am so happy to see you!"**

The UN has asked the developed countries to share the responsibility with Hungary and Turkey, and the European Union has responded with compassion. They are proposing mandatory quotas for each of the twenty-eight EU member-nations to help relocate refugees. But Germany has extended the greatest welcome as a country that knows the consequences of civil war, persecution and genocide from World War II. As a result of their generosity, an estimated eight-hundred-thousand refugees will likely request asylum in Germany. Thus far, the U.S. has responded to this global crisis by allowing entry to ten-thousand Syrian refugees sometime in the future. The United Kingdom is accepting twenty-thousand.

The small country of Germany identifies itself as just 61% Christian and the UK identifies as 59% Christian compared to 73% in the United States that identify themselves as Christian. Yet, these less Christian countries are acting more Christ-like when it comes to helping Syrian refugees. The International Rescue Committee is pleading with the U.S. to allow sixty-five-thousand refugees to seek asylum here compared to the eight-hundred-thousand Germany is prepared to accept with gladness.

In response to the disciples' questions about who would be the greatest, Jesus emphasizes the relationship between welcome and greatness. His message is: If you want to be great, you must celebrate and welcome others, especially those who can benefit you the least. This kind of welcome is possible only when we see God in others.

Dr. Jackson said she is encouraged about the possibilities offered by this moment in our nation's history. This moment gives us the opportunity for

each of us to see the faces of Syrians and other refugees as people who seek peace, people who long for a safe home, and people who have endured the ravages of civil war. And in their faces we are called to see God. What a sacred moment this offers us as a nation.

### **CHRIST-LIKE HOSPITALITY**

When my mother and I visited the rescue mission in McAllen, Texas where Monika Rhodes worked for a week last spring, we saw some of the little children who had crossed the border from Mexico unaccompanied. I could imagine Jesus setting one of them on his lap and saying to us that whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Christ-like hospitality is not about economics even though our past history shows that welcoming immigrants helps our economy. Here is a list of seven ways immigrants grow the American economy from: [WhiteHouse.gov](http://WhiteHouse.gov).

This list helps to explain how our American success would not be possible without the generations of immigrants who came from every corner of our globe.

1. **Immigrants start businesses.**
2. **Immigrant-owned businesses create jobs for American workers.** According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, small businesses owned by immigrants employed 4.7 million workers, and generated 776 billion dollars.
3. **Immigrants are also more likely to create their own jobs.**
4. **Immigrants develop cutting-edge technologies and companies.** According to the National Venture Capital Association, immigrants have started twenty-five percent of public U.S. companies that were backed by venture capital investors. This list includes Google, eBay, Yahoo!, Sun Microsystems, and Intel.
5. **Immigrants are our engineers, scientists, and innovators.** Foreign-born inventors are credited with contributing to more than seventy-five percent of patents issued to the top ten patent-producing universities.
6. **Immigration boosts earnings for American workers.** Increased immigration is correlated with increasing earnings of Americans by 0.7 percent and is expected to contribute to an increase of 1.8 percent over the long-term, according to a study by the University of California at Davis.
7. **Immigrants boost demand for local consumer goods.** (And the most important thing to remember in all of this is that immigrants are us.

No one here can claim that this was our ancient homeland.)

## **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF**

Jesus Christ commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves, including those from other countries and from faiths different from our own. This love of neighbor is not simply about granting asylum. It doesn't end with opening our shores. That is just the beginning. Christ-like welcome is about receiving others with gladness. For example, we must pray for guidance to discern any Muslim-suspensions within our own hearts and minds. Even the most Christian, liberal, and justice-seeking among us are not immune to unconscious suspicions of others.

I must admit, I currently have no friends who are Muslim. I have not intentionally broadened my scope of friends that far. My Christian practice of hospitality is lacking because I haven't made a concerted effort. So to rectify this, one of my goals for this next year is to reach out beyond my comfort zone in a meaningful way to the Muslim community here in town. In New Jersey I used to get invited to a Muslim community's end of Ramadan feast every year. It was wonderful and surprising that a woman pastor would be invited to a Muslim feast.

Jesus tells us the path to greatness is not based on our assumptions about others, not based on whether we see them as our equals. And it is not based on our presumptions about whether they can benefit our lives in some way.

No, the path to our greatness as individuals, as the Presbyterian Church of the Roses community, and as a nation is the path of humility and welcome, receiving others with faithful gladness. In order to do so, we must recognize the face of God in all people. (That is the reason our Montgomery High School free breakfast works so well. There are no screening tests to see if the students qualify to eat breakfast with us. All are warmly welcomed. Unconditional hospitality is powerful. Ultimately, this path of humble welcome leads to peace in our region and world.

As we kick-off another year of ministry here at Church of the Roses, we must remember that Jesus said that all the children are welcome.

**because your ancestors  
were welcomed here as immigrants.**

So in response to the outpouring of God's grace upon you, my hope is for you to do as Jesus and James commanded and share God's unconditional amazing grace by welcoming others into our church and into your heart.

The sustainable future of Presbyterian Church of the Roses depends on your faithful commitment and humble Christian hospitality in response to the "knock knocks" you hear at our doors. You might not know when or how you will be caring for these displaced desperate brothers and sisters and children. But trust in God to show you your role in welcoming the least of these into God's place of refuge for healing and wholeness. Amen

### **Benediction:**

**Knock, knock! Who's there? Orange!  
Orange who? Orange you glad this is the  
last knock knock joke for today?**

**I know you will warmly welcome and  
invite everyone you meet to come to our  
church this Fall for a chance to learn and  
grow in their faith alongside us. (People  
love to be invited.)**

**May the grace May the grace of our Lord  
Jesus Christ, the love of God and the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us  
now and forever more. Amen**



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**You are one of those children of God who  
has been blessed with the opportunity to  
live in the United States of America**