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Immigration and Lament: Honesty in Suffering (Luke 18:23-25)

We live in a historically unprecedented moment. In Atlanta, immigration agents arrested a Central American asylum seeker and worship leader in the very church he helped plant. He was adhering to all the rules and procedures of federal law and even wore an ankle monitor. Immigration officers intentionally interrupted the service and sermon to stir fear and terror in the church community—they knew his exact location at all times from the ankle monitor. This is evil; this is terrorism. In another recent case, Border Patrol agents in Bakersfield arrested a Latino gardener—a US citizen and business owner—while driving his company truck to work. They slashed his tires, detained him for four hours, and accused him of human smuggling, because his employee was undocumented. As terrible as these things are, they are not surprising because they have been telegraphed for years by the current office holder of the presidency.

What happened next, however, stunned me and sank deep into my heart.

Seven years ago, by the grace of God, my family and I had the privilege of working to stop the unjust deportation of an immigrant pastor. After a national campaign of faith, legal and political advocacy, and the interventions of numerous Christian leaders and denominations, this pastor was miraculously set free. This past Friday I learned that this same pastor, still under threat of deportation and family separation, stated publicly that if he were a citizen he might vote for Donald Trump.

In this moment of profound spiritual and social confusion, I find myself resonating deeply with the disciples in Luke 8:23-24¹:

“A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’”

Just like the disciples in this passage, I feel the spiritual windstorm of the present moment, and my boat is sinking as it is rapidly filling with water. I find myself crying out, together with the disciples:

“Master, Master, we are perishing...”

“Don’t you see?”

“Don’t you see the millions of Latino immigrants filled with fear and terror? The children who have not gone to school in weeks because they are afraid their parents will not be home when they return? Do you not see them run and cling to their mother and father each time they hear a police or ambulance siren? Lord, what about the university students who have not gone back to campus this past month because they are the only documented member of their family, their parents are afraid to leave the house, and so they have assumed the heavy weight of

¹ I am grateful to Rev. Harold Segura, who pointed me and others to this passage as a structure for lament during the recent gathering of the Latino Christian National Network.

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all economic obligations? Do you hear the cries of the victims of domestic violence who are now afraid to call the police, and who no longer go to church, their only safe haven?”

“Lord, how is it possible that the theological formation of so many Latino pastors is so misshapen that they have fallen into self-hatred and cannot biblically discern the very ethical questions which threaten the well-being of their own families and congregations?”

Jesus, I love you with all of my heart. The wind and waves have come close to sinking my boat many times before, but you have always been faithful. I am sinking once again. Thank you that in your infinite and perfect love, you welcome my sincere lament.² I look to you for rescue. Like the disciples before us, we look to you for hope:

And waking up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. Then he said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were terrified and amazed and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?”

– Rev. Dr. Robert Chao Romero

² For more on the spiritual practice of lament, see:
<https://www.soulcarewithherica.com/practices/lament>