

World Refugee Day Reflection – June 20, 2021
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Today we remember and hold up people who are refugees, which is wonderful, and should be celebrated. However, refugees are only a small part of the numbers of highly vulnerable people who are on the move – people who are fleeing persecution, people who are fleeing violence and conflict, people who are fleeing disasters and climate related challenges. People who are looking to simply feed their family and live safe productive lives.

The number of people who are displaced is about 79.5 million (the new number reported yesterday was 82 million), and 32% or 26 million of those are considered refugees, and less than 1% of that number, the number of refugees, are resettled to the US.

What that means is the vast majority of displaced people, some of the most vulnerable people in our world, are actually displaced within their own country; and the vast majority of those who are refugees are actually hosted in poorer and neighboring countries with far less resources to manage their situation. So the wealthier countries actually carry far less of this burden.

I know there is a lot of politics around this, but migration, displacement, and refugees are a part of our country's history. Welcoming the stranger is who we are as a nation. If you read "The New Colossus" poem by Emma Lazarus, etched into the Statue of Liberty with the famous line: "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore," you would be surprised by how much of the poem talks about our light to the world's most vulnerable.

I know there is a lot of politics around this, but migration, displacement, and refugees are a part of our faith and Biblical texts. In the Bible we find references to people who are on the move, people are migrating, people who are displaced and people who cross national borders – along with today's Bible verses: Deuteronomy 10:17-22 & Matthew 25:31-46; the book of Exodus is the story of the Jewish people leaving Egypt; in Luke 2, 1-7, the story we hear so often at Christmas, the story of Jesus' birth is a story of migration, movement; Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:8-21; and there are so many more. So our Christian faith and our Biblical texts demand that we welcome our neighbor and care for the stranger.

This World Refugee Day, and throughout the year, let us remember our brothers and sisters who are displaced – without home, income or food, sometimes pursued for their beliefs – and who may not have a place to lay their head tonight, or tomorrow, or the

next night. Let us remember that these are people, individuals who are much like us – and for me, personally, whose mother was an immigrant, and having heard her story of migration many times, her story is much like the stories of many refugees. So let us not forget them as people created in the image of God, and deserving, love, care and support. Let us not forget on World Refugee Day that refugees are not just our family, but all the displaced are us.