

## **A Shelter in Life's Storms: Sanctuary for Immigrants seeking Documentation**

Ched Myers (from Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation, The Center for Action and Contemplation, March 18, 2025).

Torah and the Prophets warned Israel not to discriminate against economic or political refugees, since in YHWH's eyes even the chosen people were "but aliens and tenants" (Leviticus 25:23). Instead, they were to treat the "sojourners in your midst" with dignity and justice (Deuteronomy 24:14). This fundamental regard for the resident alien, and call to solidarity with the "outsider," came to full realization in the teaching and practice of Jesus of Nazareth. An oft-cited verse that captures this is Matthew's last-judgment parable, in which Jesus commends those who welcome him in the guise of a stranger—and condemns those who do not (Matthew 25:35–46). (5)

Three archetypally vulnerable groups are commonly named in almost formulaic fashion: widows, orphans, and *strangers*. Because YHWH "watches over" them (Psalm 146:9), they have intrinsic rights to sustenance (Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:19–21, 26:12–13) and to human rights (Deuteronomy 27:19; Psalm 94:6). And the prophets measure the health of the nation by how widows, orphans, and strangers are treated (Jeremiah 7:6, 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5)....

But there is another, theologically startling characteristic of scripture: from beginning to end, *God too* is portrayed entering our world in the guise of a stranger in need of hospitality. One of the first divine epiphanies is YHWH's mysterious appearance in the form of "three guests" (Genesis 18:1–8). Abraham and Sarah offer them food, drink, and shelter, and their hospitality occasions the great promise of progeny that launches the salvation story of an entire people (Genesis 18:9–10)....

We can go further: the God of the Bible is consistently portrayed as "stateless," and we can reasonably add *undocumented*. This is in stark contrast to the patron-gods of the empires that surrounded Israel, who lived comfortably in the temples of the king. In the Exodus tradition, the wilderness God doesn't even have a *name*, much less "papers": the moniker YHWH means "I will be whoever I will be" (Exodus 3:14). God's voice summons Moses into a conspiracy for freedom from a burning bush *outside* the borders of, and in opposition to, Pharaoh's political and economic system. Inspired and led by this God, the Hebrews flee Egypt "in haste" (Exodus 12:33), and wander in the desert as a people with no legal status—as political refugees still must do.

*The Gospel writers portray Jesus as a refugee in need of hospitality:*

The Second Testament continues in this tradition. The gospel story begins with Jesus' family fleeing violence as political refugees, pushed around Palestine by the imperial forces of Caesar and Herod (Matthew 2; Luke 2). The adult Jesus not only characterizes himself as homeless ("the Human One has nowhere to lay his head," Luke 9:58), but *stateless*. "My kingdom is not of this world," he says before the Roman procurator (John 18:36). The evangelists also portray Jesus as a constant recipient of hospitality who sometimes even "invites himself in" (see, for example, Luke 19:5). (57-58)

Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, [\*Our God Is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice\*](#) (Orbis, 2012).

### **To think about...**

1. How was the subject of immigrants handled in your family of origin? How were immigrants viewed? Favorably? Welcomed? Disdained? Distrusted? With compassion? With contempt?
2. How have immigrants been depicted in the media you read, hear, or watch? More pariah or blessing?
3. How does documentation factor into people's view of immigrants?
4. How does documentation affect compassion?
5. How does the above, very brief overview of the scripture's voice on the treatment of immigrants sit with you? Any surprises? Any tension created?
6. Why do you think Jesus equated our treatment of immigrants with how we treat Jesus?

# Home

by Warsan Shire

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city  
running as well

your neighbors running faster  
than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind  
the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his  
body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless  
home chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever  
thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the  
anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in  
an airport toilet  
sobbing as each mouthful of  
paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't  
be going back.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children  
in a boat  
unless the water is safer than  
the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights  
in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless  
the miles travelled  
means something more than  
journey.  
no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough  
enough

the  
go home blacks  
refugees  
dirty immigrants  
asylum seekers  
sucking our country dry  
niggers with their hands out  
they smell strange  
savagely  
messed up their country and  
now they want  
to mess ours up  
how do the words  
the dirty looks  
roll off your backs  
maybe because the blow is  
softer  
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender  
than fourteen men between  
your legs  
or the insults are easier  
to swallow  
than rubble  
than bone  
than your child body  
in pieces.  
i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a  
shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the  
shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs

leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg  
forget pride  
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home  
is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i dont know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

Click to hear Warsan Shire  
recount her poem, [Home](#).

Warsan Shire (born August 1st, 1988) is a British writer, poet, editor and teacher, who was born to Somali parents in Kenya, east Africa. In 2013, she was awarded the inaugural Brunel University African Poetry Prize, chosen from a shortlist of six candidates out of a total 655 entries. Her words "No one leaves home unless/home is the mouth of a shark," have been called "a rallying call for refugees and their advocates."

