

WGUMC September 15, 2013 Welcoming the Other
Leviticus 19:33-34 and Luke 10:25-37

What do you think of when you hear the word "alien"? Do you picture a scary, slimy creature bursting out of someone's chest? Maybe it's because of the movie that we conjure up such bizarre, inhuman images when the word itself, coming from the Latin, simply means "other."

Hollywood has one way of dealing with aliens. The Bible has another. In the movie, everyone is trying to kill them. In the Bible God wants us to protect them. It really is amazing, considering all the indiscriminate killing that goes on in the Bible: the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. "I will blot them out," says the Lord. [Ex 23:23]

Yet, rooted deep in the Hebrew consciousness is both a personal and communal experience of being "other." Abraham was sent out from his own country to live as an alien in a foreign land. As a young man, Moses fled his birthplace in

Egypt. He named his son, Gershom, a play on the Hebrew words *ger sham*, which mean "an alien there." And when he received the law of God on Sinai, it was filled with commandments about how to treat the alien.

If only members of Congress would read them! Oppressing the alien must have been as common back then as it is today, because this warning in Leviticus gets repeated three times.

[Lev 19:33; Ex 22:2, Ex 23:9] God seems to think that the Hebrews should know better because "you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." [Ex 23:9] So, they should know how to treat them: give the resident alien a fair hearing. [Dt 1:16] Do not deprive them of justice. [Dt 24:17; 27:19]

But that's not all. The Hebrews were not only supposed to lift their burdens, they were also to give them blessings. The Sabbath rest is for aliens, too. [Ex 20:10] Farmers, do not harvest to the edges of your field. Leave the gleanings for the

poor and the alien. [Leviticus 19:10] Let the alien join in the Passover feast. For "there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you." [Ex 12:49, see also Lev 24:22; Nu 9:14; 15:15; 15:16 and 15:29] Just imagine what would happen if we heeded God's Word today: our migrant workers would, at the least, have better pay, safer working conditions, and access to education and health care.

What we have forgotten is what the Hebrews kept forgetting, that we are all resident aliens in this land. All of us came from someplace else. Even the Native Americans. All of us are "other" to someone else. But that's not a bad thing, because our experience of being "other" is the very foundation upon which we can build a life of being neighbor.

That's the gist of Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were others in the land of Judah. They thought of themselves as true descendants of the northern tribes when that kingdom fell to the Assyrians back in 722 B.C. But the

Jews considered them to be aliens, immigrants who had moved into Northern Israel. They had a different culture, read a different version of the Torah, worshiped on a different mountain. To the Jews, they weren't just aliens, but heretics.

Yet the Jew in Jesus' story, left for dead by the side of the road, probably didn't care. Lucky for him that the Samaritan didn't either. The Samaritan was an alien, he knew the heart of an alien, and so he had a heart for this man who was a total stranger to him. He could overlook the vast differences between them, the whole history of hostility, because he could see their common humanity. And for that reason, he welcomed this other into his life, into his care, and put him on his list of responsibilities. In short, he showed the man mercy.

"Go and do likewise," Jesus said. But to just anyone? I don't care if we are in Willow Glen or Western Mongolia, there is no one too alien for us to help. Consider this: no person on this

planet is stranger to us than we are to God. And if God can love us, we can certainly love any other. "Go and do likewise."

It's not the easiest thing in the world. But it's not at all impossible. I have proof right here in the form of Alison Praisewater. She's going to tell us about welcoming the children of Haiti into her life, and the difference that has made in her heart.