

My writing today is more of a personal reflection than a sermon notes document. I am very aware that George Floyd is on the minds of some of you. He is certainly on mine. I am praying not only for the family, but also asking God for the strength to make the world a better place for all us. I share my own small attempt to make the world a better place. You know by now that we have a foster daughter. You might be wondering why and where she is from.

Why - On June 18th, 2019 I listened to a border patrol agent mocking young children in a detention center because they cried out for their parents. I could not, still cannot, stand the sound of this guard joking that he was listening to an orchestra that needed a conductor. About a month later, sick and tired of being sick and tired, I emailed Catholic Charities on Jul 15, 2019 @ 8:30 AM. This was my extremely small attempt to do something, anything, to make the world fractionally better.

Where - We cannot share any details about our foster and can't give you any biographical detail. I can tell you that three weeks ago, our foster daughter arrived at Oakland International. I am thrilled that she has a chance to make a life here. Related to her arrival, I have no illusion that I will fix the border. We can help *her*, and that is what I can do right now.

The road ahead: She has a fraught path ahead in order for her to thrive in the US. 1/3 of un-accompanied refugee foster youth get a high school degree. 2% of all fosters ("regular" and unaccompanied minors) graduate from college. I tell you these stats because, with the heroic efforts of dozens of people advocating for her, the odds are still stacked against our newest family member. I am learning in very personal ways how much it will take for our foster to have a life that most of us take for granted.

As of this writing, she will have to complete a high school level education in the next couple of years. She will need to function in an English classroom by September 2020. She is really smart, but can she (*could you*) come to a different country and become functional in that country's language in three months and manage in a foreign language classroom? You're probably thinking, why not bilingual education? In 1998, proposition 227 was enacted in California to nearly eliminate bilingual education.

Would you be able to make up many years worth of educational deficit with your own bootstraps? BTW, "pick yourself up by your bootstraps" was initially an ironic saying that meant no one could do the impossible: picking themselves up by the strap of their boots. I am not necessarily blaming the US or her home country for her situation. However, I am keenly aware of the geopolitics that are breaking communities into pieces throughout Central and South America. If you want a taste of my thoughts about politics in Latin America, I offer you previous thoughts on El Salvador [past sermon notes](#).

Faith: Our faith impels us to create a community specifically for those on the edge. We don't create a place of justice just by liking the people that are like us. Maybe our foster will founder in high school, but I will do whatever I can to help her reach her potential. Catholic Charities has an army of people working for her, and SRVUSD has been spectacular in helping us find the right fit. Kimberly has jumped in, and the water is great. We have found the right food, the right grocery stores, and the right clothes. Kristin, Scott MacDougall's sister, is helping with ESL during this weird quarantine time. We work on math, writing, biking, cooking, and a host of other cultural and functional activities, even though we cannot go anywhere.

Enculturation: I am commissioned by Catholic Charities to help her function as a young person within an American context. I want to do everything I can for her to be understood with an English accent when possible. I want her to be able, if possible, to code switch between highland campesino and bay area high schooler when she wants to. I can hear some of you tussling me that her culture is not less important than mine – I agree, but it is our commission. I will do everything I can to give her a shot in the US, even if she goes back to her home country, and never looks back. At least she will have known that five odd gringos loved her along the way.

Enculturation, Oklahoma: In a much lower stakes way, I have had to learn my own adaptation.' When I go back to Oklahoma, I code switch my fly-over-state-family which would never fly at Round Hill Country Club. Because of my gender and social location, I have the privilege and facility to feel comfortable any--almost any-- space, but even with this privilege, it took a lot of work not to be a redneck at the Country Club, nor to be a left coast Californian in Oklahoma.

Enculturation, Dulac: You remember the 2019 high school mission trip in Dulac, Louisiana. One night we all had the privilege of listening to Kirby, who is the Methodist pastor in Dulac. Kirby is a Houma Indian who told his story that night. He looks "white" and passed as white for decades in his early professional career. He heard awful racist stuff about the Houma, but kept his mouth shut to have a good job. When God called him to advocate for his community, he brought all his unearned privilege of looking white and speaking white in order to make a difference. He relentlessly preaches education for the Houma kids of the area.

It is a fishing community, and there is a hierarchy. The engineers and ship captains are largely white. The Houma Indians are shrimpers. They did not choose it, and it was forced on them. Shrimping is the most vulnerable, bottom rung of the whole economic system.

He said, "I am wanting my kids and my friends' kids to be captains and engineers." He said that outsiders telling him to keep shrimping because it was authentically Houma is its own kind of racism. "We have our folkways, but shrimping is not our heritage." If our foster chooses native ways both culturally and economically, we will celebrate, but by God, I will give her every tool at my disposal to find the freedom she needs to pursue her dreams wherever she can.

Quick side aside on Acts: It would be a significant mistake to interpret this as a community of 'different strokes for different folks' communal utopia. The Acts community was not a cultural melting pot. It was a community following the call to live like the Jerusalem Temple that was intended by scripture. The temple of Luke's day fell far short of the Deuteronomic vision of the Temple being the epicenter of justice and charity. These early followers from many cultures focused on justice and charity because they believed the vision of God. It was a Spirit driven -- scriptural vision where caring for the poor was given. Creating a barrier against a world that strips the poor of their capital, vitality and dignity was an expectation. Acts describes of people coming together to break down the barriers erected by extreme poverty and religious entitlement.

So long story - Deuteronomy 15 - *However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.*

Thanks for reading what is going with me right now.

Todd