

God is a people mover

Her complexion suggested strong chai. Slight of build, she still easily pushed the wheelchair containing my elderly mother through Chicago's O'Hare Airport. She had arrived less than a year ago from Myanmar and lived in a neighborhood known as an immigrant entry point close to where I live. Intrigued to be unexpectedly conversing with someone fresh from the land of Adoniram Judson, I asked why she would tolerate living in Chicago in January. She spoke of a harsh political climate and her excitement to be in the U.S.

According to the Pew Forum and 2014 U.S. Census, immigrants account for 13 percent of the U.S. population. That shakes out to 42.391 million people. Five percent are Muslim. Seventy-four percent self-identify as Christian. The top three countries of origin for immigrants to the U.S. are: Mexico (12.38 million), the Philippines (1.82 million), and India (1.66 million). These are followed by Puerto Rico, China, El Salvador, and Vietnam, all with more than one million each. In 2013, 990,553 people were granted legal permanent resident status. Department of Homeland Security statistics show nearly half, 46.4 percent of those, were new arrivals.

Large cities have always been entry points and gathering places for immigrants, legal and otherwise. Noteworthy now is the accumulation of immigrants in mid-size and small cities, even towns. I say again, what the city sees today, everyone sees tomorrow. For example, in the past 15 years, the foreign-born population of Gwinnett County, GA, outside Atlanta, has more than doubled. Similar increases have been seen in places like Scranton, PA, Indianapolis, IN, and Des Moines, IA. The nations are not merely arriving in our land but are being dispersed throughout the country. Your local mini-mart, hospital, and community college bear witness to this reality.

Yes, more than ever, the mission field is coming to us. Also, thousands are arriving from nations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China, where missionary access has been difficult or denied. Many of these new arrivals experience freedom they did not enjoy in their countries of origin.

Linking new arrivals to safety and security concerns is nothing new. These issues have been at the forefront in past waves of immigration. The phrase, "There goes the neighborhood,"

"IMMIGRANTS DRAIN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC RESOURCES." 48% OF EVANGELICALS

voices a sentiment that was around long before our generation. Different now is the speed of travel, the numbers, and fresh visions of terror and mayhem on our screens.

Forty-eight percent of evangelicals say, "Immigrants drain the country's economic resources." Furthermore, more evangelicals admit the media influences their views on immigration more than Scripture, their local church, and national Christian leaders combined, according to this same research. (12/15 Lifeway Research)

We value our security: physical, social, and economic. When does valuing turn to worshiping? When does something we value become an idol? An easy answer would be when that thing displaces God. We are loath to acknowledge anything displaces God. How do we make that judgment?

Jesus made quite clear our mission in life is to make disciples of all nations. Anything that gets in the way of Jesus' command is, at

best, running the danger of displacing God. If I move to get away from "them" or if I vote to keep "them" out, is my value system God-centered or self-centered?

Let's consider several things.

God is in control, specifically of this world and the people in it. "The earth is the Lord's ... the world, and those in it" (Psalm 24:1). God has a track record of moving people from one place to another to accomplish His purposes. In Genesis 11, God is moving Abraham and his family. In Genesis 37, God moves Joseph to Egypt, and then moves Jacob's whole family to Egypt. In Joshua 1, God moves His people into the Promised Land. At the end of 2 Kings we see God moving Judah to Babylon. In Nehemiah, God begins to move the people back to their land. In Luke 2, we see God moving Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. In Acts 2, we read a list of places from which people have come to Jerusalem for what God will do on the day of Pentecost.

Persecution is scattering believers in the opening verses of Acts 8. In Acts 13, God sends two of his choicest servants to faraway places.

"... God ... from one man ... made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth and He determined ... the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him ..." (Acts 17:26, 27).

God is all about His plan to redeem. If all you see are radical Muslims, egotistical heads of state, famine, and warring factions, you only see what unbelievers see. We are blind then, if we don't see God's hand in the current massive population shifts in our world. What is God doing where you live? How will you join Him in His work?



by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org