

Editorial: We have mourning to do and action to take

July 27, 2022

Remembering

Immigrants

Do you remember when [53 immigrants died](#) after being trapped in a tractor trailer? That was just 31 days ago, but the news cycle moved on for many of us, and perhaps we forgot.

[The Guatemalan village where many were from hasn't forgotten.](#) Have you forgotten your loved ones who died needlessly? Have you completely moved on?

Meanwhile, here in the United States, we skip mourning that needless loss of life, and the action we take is to blame and argue. We blame the immigrants for their fate, and we argue from what we must admit is a privileged position about legal versus illegal immigration. If we doubt that, we ought to consider how different our argument would look if we were the immigrants.

Native and Indigenous people

Do you remember when kids were sent to boarding schools against their parents' wills? That was a bit farther back than 31 days ago, but [it ended within the lifetimes of some of our current readers](#). In fact, it ended in the United States in 1978, three years after I was born.

It may not have been *our* kids or *our* parents or *our* grandparents forcibly

separated from family and sent to boarding schools. So, it may never come to our minds.

[The descendants of Indian boarding schools haven't forgotten.](#) If you think they should, would you? If it was your family slaughtered and corralled by some other nation, forced to assimilate to some other culture, would you simply forget it, get over it, move on?

Yesterday, [Pope Francis apologized for the Roman Catholic Church's role in Canadian boarding schools and pledged further action.](#)

Meanwhile, here in the United States, [we're passing laws to keep our own history out of the history books.](#) Baptists, for their part, may not have established and run Indian boarding schools, but that doesn't mean Baptists are in the clear.

When we stand before God, we may not be judged for someone else's sin, but we will be judged for our own. To wash our hands of guilt in the water of gratitude that we aren't Roman Catholic is to be the Pharisee thanking God he isn't that sinner back in the back.

Meanwhile, [that sinner back in the back is confessing his sin and pleading with God for mercy.](#) Jesus commended that sinner back in the back.

The hungry

Do you remember when almost a quarter of your family and your neighbors were hungry? I mean, barely getting enough food each day and not likely enough food each week. I mean, scrounging for food and so hungry you'd be willing to eat fast food from a dumpster.

This isn't something that happened 31 days ago or 44 years ago. This is a problem still happening right now as you read. You and I may even be reading this while mindlessly eating a between-meal snack.

In Texas, [about 18 percent of our Hispanic and 24 percent of our Black neighbors are well aware of how hungry they are ... right now.](#)

Here again, this is not a problem “over there.” Nor is it simply a problem of their own making. When Texas Baptists remember [20 percent of our churches are Hispanic and almost 17 percent of our churches are African American,](#) then we will see hunger is *our* problem *right here*.

When we—and by “we” here, I am presuming white readers—understand the official and unofficial policies that governed and shaped Hispanic and Black communities and families and generations, then we will understand blaming “them” for “their” problems is dismissive of *our* role in “their” problems.

Acting

First, acknowledge.

We cannot correct what we will not admit is wrong. Our sin is not merely a spiritual state we confess away. It is a physical reality rippling through the world around each one of us. When we confess our sin, we are confessing not just private thoughts, but public actions. We cannot mourn what we will not acknowledge.

Second, mourn.

When we mourn the results of sin, we don’t mourn just for ourselves. We mourn that others suffer from our sin. We mourn with others, even if their suffering is not the result of our individual actions.

We mourn because we acknowledge sin and sin’s effects. We mourn because we agree with God that the brokenness of our world was not God’s created intent. We mourn, not in hopelessness, but in the full hope of God’s restoration of all things.

We mourn, not just as an emotional expression or in mental assent with God. We mourn as a prelude to our enacted obedience of God's command to [love our neighbors](#). We mourn as we join in God's restorative work.

Third, act.

Pope Francis pledged further action by the Roman Catholic Church. We should not think there is no action for *us* to take.

In the case of Guatemalan immigrants—as well as Honduran, Mexican and others—some of our churches send mission teams there to do short-term events and to teach about Jesus.

Would these same churches make the commitment to work long term and hand-in-hand with Guatemalans in Guatemala to create the kind of place at home that so many Guatemalans seek in the United States? Not because we don't want Guatemalans, but because we want Guatemalans to enjoy Guatemala as much as we enjoy the United States. In fact, [it's what many Guatemalans want](#).

Read the names, ages and country of origin of these immigrants [here](#).

In the case of Native and Indigenous people, a preliminary action we should take is to know our own history in relation to Native and Indigenous people.

Baptists may not have founded and run Indian boarding schools, but Baptists likely were involved in attacking and relocating Native Americans. Knowing our history will clear up "likely" in the preceding sentence and shed light on what subsequent action we need to take.

In the case of our hungry neighbors, our action includes changing policies and sharing food. It looks like the church's response to the Greek widows described in [Acts 6](#).

Becoming biblical, becoming just

To the charge that Christians aren't called to this kind of social ministry but only to a spiritual ministry of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of Jesus, I say the model of Christian community held up in [Acts 2](#) and [4](#)—not to mention the whole of the prophetic books of the Old Testament and the words of Jesus recorded in [Matthew 25](#)—makes clear our spiritual condition is revealed and proved in our behavior toward others.

By the way, that sinner back in the back was a tax collector. Tax collectors lived off the fat of the land. Baptists, we may not consider ourselves particularly wealthy as individuals, but corporately, we've lived off the fat of the land. Many of our church buildings, universities and institutions—among the most physically impressive structures in our communities—prove it. It's time we learn something from Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus.

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