

# Commentary: Christmas, Christians and the foreigner among us

December 11, 2019

It's that time of year again, and all across Texas, the greeting of "Merry Christmas" rings out in all shapes and forms. Whether it's a hearty "Feliz Navidad" or a transliterated "Shèngdàn jié kuàilè" in Chinese or even an "Eid milad saeid" from the local Arabic Christian congregation, Christmas, like the Christ child it celebrates, has the power to unite us all.

That's a tall order in these troubling times.

In fiscal year 2019, 2,457 victims of war and persecution made a new home in Texas, according to the U.S. Department of State. Hundreds of thousands more attempted to immigrate through our southern border. Political passions on both sides of the issue have reached the boiling point in local churches.

From the earliest days of Christianity, when Cornelius the centurion chose to follow the same Christ as Simon the Zealot, a wide spectrum of political opinions colored the fabric of the church. Whether it's Roman rule or a border wall, conflict in Christendom over the temporal issues of the times really is nothing new. However, the challenge for the follower of Christ is to look deeper, to see our world and its issues through the lens of faith and eternity, and to respond with the heart and wisdom of Jesus. In this way, we may not solve all the political problems, but we can find unity in how to minister in the midst of the fray.

# Making disciples in times like ours

Christ gave us commands to love (John 13:34-35) and to make disciples (Matthew 28:19), yet we misunderstand both.

Love is not “enabling,” and making disciples has nothing to do with rounding up “converts.” Love is caring and coming alongside others while equipping and encouraging them to be everything they were created to be. In like manner, discipleship is compassionate teaching and training that helps someone awaken to who God is and grow in relationship with him through Christ.

In this critical time in history, churches have a unique opportunity to fulfill both commands, and many congregations have caught the vision.

Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth has been serving the community through English-as-Second-Language and literacy classes since 2002. The church helps students like an immigrant from Iraq who is studying to get his GED because he wants to serve in the U.S. Army as one of his family members already does. Kia, an immigrant from Albania, has grown in her English skills and become a citizen. She also has come to faith in Christ.

Other churches like Harwood Terrace in Bedford and Central Bible in Fort Worth have followed suit, ministering to people from around the globe.

“Go into all the world” is no longer the domain of foreign missionaries. World politics have propelled right to our backdoor people from nations that historically have been “closed” to the gospel. How will we respond?

As we wish each other “Merry Christmas” or hear jolly “Feliz Navidad” this season, let’s look past the politics of the moment and heed these basic commands, remembering that he who we celebrate in a manger also became a refugee in Egypt before he died to save the world.

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