

“Dream God’s Dream”

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Once there was a man named Samuel. Samuel loved God and always listened when God spoke. One day God had a special job for Samuel. “I want you to find a new king,” said God. Samuel wanted to do as God had asked but wasn’t sure how to do this job. So he said to God, “Where will I go? How will I find the new king?”

God spoke again to Samuel. “Go and find Jesse. Jesse has many children. One of them will be the new king. I will show you which one to choose. So, Samuel traveled to the town where Jesse and his family lived. Samuel looked at Jesse’s sons one by one.

“This one is handsome,” (point to a congregant.)

But God said, “No, not this one.” (Point to another.)

Samuel looked at another son. “This one looks strong,” (Point to another.)

But God said, “No, not this one.” (walk away and point to several others - each time say, “No, not this one.”)

Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Do you have any more children?”

Jesse said, “Yes, one more. There is my youngest son, David; he is a shepherd and he’s out in the field looking after the sheep.”

“Please send for David,” said Samuel. When Samuel saw David, (Choose one more

person.) he heard God say, “Yes! This is the one. David will be the king.” And Samuel carefully poured oil on David’s head to let everyone know that he had been chosen by God.

For now Saul was King, but some day the throne would fall to David. Until then, David played his harp and watched the sheep and sang songs to God.

Sing: “Now little David was a Shepard king, he did play so loud that the heavens did ring...little David play on your harp allelu, allelu, little David play on your harp allelu-ia.”

A child shepherd-that is who God chose to provide a future for Israel-not a choice you or I might have made. **But God’s dreams for us are bigger than our dreams for ourselves-** and God chooses an unlikely cast of characters to play **key** roles in the fulfillment of those dreams. Look around you, with all do respect, we are a pretty unlikely cast of characters and yet I think we can safely say that we are living out a part God’s dream in Princeton Illinois.

You see, in contrast to human understanding, God sees into the hearts of people and calls forth their potential. A fact that is often overlooked in a society built on the idea that life is just one big popularity contest.

What is being proposed here, is that God’s chosen leaders are maybe not the one’s who are

chosen first for the soccer team, or who have a date to the prom, or who make over half a million dollars a year, or who have legal residence in the great US of A. No, the chosen one might be a Shepard boy tending the fields, or a migrant worker picking mushrooms or cleaning toilets. Not necessarily whom we would think to choose, but whom God would choose to lead the people. God is concerned with the unseen, the heart of a person, the very center and core of the one to be anointed.

I mentioned in our prayer time last week that one of the hot button issues at the Annual Meeting was “Immigration Reform” and the Illinois Conference’s commitment to bringing a resolution to the General Synod of the UCC encouraging the US Government to create a more humane immigration policy. There are complete copies available of the Resolution that passed at the Annual Meeting and will go before the Synod gathering in Hartford CT. in 2008, I hope you take the time to read it in its entirety.

One of the challenges in promoting more humane policies is a lack of understanding about what is at stake, and how it got to be this way. As such, I would like to read to you an excerpt from the UCC news that came out this past May-in the hopes that it may shed some light on the issues at hand. But first a couple of scripture references to keep in mind in addition to the one we have already discussed this morning. The Hebrew Bible tells us: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Leviticus

19:33-34)." In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger (cf. Matthew 25:35), for "what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto Me. (Matthew 25:40)
"TUCSON, Ariz. — Every day, thousands of men, women and children from Mexico and Central America attempt to cross the border into Arizona. They travel hundreds of miles, often on borrowed money. Some come with the promise of a job. Others come to rejoin family. Many are Christians, carrying with them religious symbols, Bibles, or pictures of the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of the Americas. Like the ancient Israelites, they believe God is with them on this journey.

There is no Red Sea to cross, only the vast Sonoran desert. Out here, Baboquivari — the foreboding sacred mountain of the Tohono O'odham nation — towers over grasslands. Thorny scrub trees offer little shade, and gnarled cacti beckon with spiky arms and fingers. Rattlesnakes wait for the cooler night hours, when the coyotes raise their voices in an otherworldly howl. Coyotes of the human variety, part of the increasingly lucrative human smuggling business, lead groups of migrants through this terrain. Sometimes, these "coyotes" prey on their human cargo — stealing their money, raping the women and girls and abandoning the weak and injured that can't keep pace.

Migration through the Sonoran desert has increased rapidly since the late 1990s, when tough border enforcement measures at urban crossing points forced migrants into the outlands. Back then, the architects of the Border Patrol strategy predicted the hazardous terrain would be a deterrent. They couldn't have been more mistaken. And so began the

cat-and-mouse game between law enforcement and those who cross the border illegally.



At makeshift shrines to the Virgin Mary, migrants stop to light candles and pray for safe passage. Rebecca Bowman Woods photo.

At some level we have to step back and say, 'Something caused this.' We have to go back to the cause. We can't just build a fence, referring to a proposal passed by the U.S. House of Representatives calling for the construction of a 700-mile wall between the U.S. and Mexico. This is an economic problem, we supposedly created free trade agreements. They must not be very fair if they are creating these desperate conditions.

'People made poor'

The Rev. Delle McCormick, a UCC minister, has watched the situation develop from south of the border, having spent most of her vocational ministry among the people of southern Mexico. McCormick now lives in Tucson and is executive director of Borderlinks, a bi-national organization offering educational trips that include living with families in Mexican border towns. She sees an unmistakable link between U.S. prosperity and the poverty to the south.

In speaking about the plight of the people of Central America and Mexico, McCormick uses the term "people made poor." "They are made poor by people, not by God," McCormick explains. "I use that language to challenge people to think about the movement from one place to another — how they got there ... and also, how we're complicit in their being made poor." Our economy is based on what they call in Latin America *gente desechable*, or "disposable people" — a justice issue in and of itself.

The term "illegal alien" is another way of refusing the humanity of the migrant," No human being can be illegal," says Liana Rowe, associate for Justice and Witness Ministries with the UCC's Southwest Conference. "This society would like to demonize these people to the point that they're not human any more."

Since 1999, the number of people dying in the desert has climbed steadily. Last year, 279 died in Arizona, not including those whose bodies were never found. Seventy-five deaths

occurred in July alone.

Meanwhile, the desert gets hotter, and the people keep coming. While migrants were once mostly men, volunteers are now seeing more women, elderly people and even unaccompanied children. Crossing the border is supposed to be a misdemeanor, based on the way the law is written but, (as it stands now) it effectively carries a death sentence."

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So what are we being asked to do, to think and to pray about?

Let's face the facts, already within the US there are between 10-12 million undocumented workers contributing to the prosperity of this country, it is time to create safe ways for them to come out of the shadows. It is time to offer avenues for migrants to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens.

We must recognize that the root causes for this migration lie in environmental, economic and trade inequities between the US, Mexico and all of Latin America-these policies reduce tariffs and taxes that would support the poor of those countries. Our government has supported policies that have effectively eliminated agricultural subsidies to Mexico and Latin America, which means only the richest people there, can own land. Poor people have no land on which to build homes, or field in which to grow food to support

themselves. We have refused to put pressure on Mexico and Latin America to regulate environmental and labor laws, which means that, poorest of the poor work under horrific conditions- in Machiladoras as sweat shop laborers. Why else would someone take their life in their hands to come to America to pick grapes for \$10.00 a day? It is time to hold our government accountable for using these people, then blaming them for coming into our country when we are doing nothing to help them create a fair and livable environment in their own countries.

Furthermore, militarizing and closing the boarder is not a solution. It's never been a solution. It simply forces people into the most dangerous part of the Arizona desert. It is estimated that 3,000 people are trying to cross the boarder each day and as many have died in the last several years.

John Butrick, the Western Association Minister of the Illinois Conference, went to the Boarder and walked the 27 mile stretch of dessert- because he needed to see it for himself. He had clean water, food and clothing and it took him over a week. Along the way he heard horrific stories of lives that had been lost by people trying to

reunite with their families. He was told of a woman who crossed the border with her young child and when the child became dehydrated and unable to keep up with the group, the Coyote left them behind. The woman stayed with the child-but with no food or water the child soon died. The woman carried the child out of the desert and to the nearest road where she was picked up by authorities, deported and arrested for child abuse. We must encourage reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting periods for separated families who currently wait an average of 15 years to be reunited.

While it is reasonable to support the right of the government to enforce the law and protect the national security interests of the United States, it is critical to recognize that our existing complex and unworkable immigration system has made it nearly impossible for many immigrants who seek to support their families or reunite with loved ones to achieve legal status.

What we know is that it's all about relationships-lives are transformed by coming face to face with the "other." That is why our youth group has gone to the Indian Reservations of

South Dakota for the last several years, and why we are going to West Virginia this summer. That is why I will go to New Orleans in the middle of hurricane season this July, that is why we are going to Biloxi Mississippi this fall. Because we know that our hearts begin to soften when we have broken bread together and we come to understand each other's stories.

As a church, we have got to look toward building relationships with the migrant people living in this County, together we must work with our legislative representatives to promote fair and just policies for those living in this country, as well as those living in Mexico and Latin America.

And I would hope, that by this time next year there will be plans in place to send a delegation from this church to the Boarder-to see it for ourselves, to begin to understand first hand why this is a matter of life and death and why as Christians we cannot continue to turn away from our brothers and sisters in need.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus assures us that God's realm grows from mustard-seed beginnings. As we live in faith, we are invited to look upon the world and ourselves with a God's-eye view. It starts small, a dream, a vision-it may look to others like a weed that some may even want to pull up out of the ground and try to get rid of-but **God's dream for us is bigger than our dreams for ourselves** and with God's help and nurture, that seed becomes a beautiful tree-a tree to provide refuge for the un-chosen, the outcast, the

disposable people. God can see it, God can imagine it, and most of all, God intends it.

Amen

Prayer

God of grace and fresh beginnings, open our eyes and spirits to see the possibilities around and within us. Grant us faith that trusts your working in new ways, through every child fashioned in your image and called to your service. Amen.

Learn more @

humaneborders.org

borderlinks.org

nomoredeaths.org

[1][1]*Rebecca Bowman Woods is news editor for DisciplesWorld magazine*

See the complete article in the UCC News by logging onto:<http://www.ucc.org/ucnews/my06/immigration.htm>