



## **I Refuse to Be Complicit**

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Several years ago, I had an opportunity to participate in an immersion program at the Sonora/Arizona border between Mexico and the United States.

It had been twenty-five years since I last visited Sonora, and I was curious what it was like to live on the border ever since the current federal administration began implanting measures to keep “Mexicans and other terrorists” from entering into the U.S.

My father being from the border city of Nogales, Sonora, I visited the border often as a youth with my family for reunions and vacations. I remembered many years of going back and forth across the border with minimal difficulties with border agents, who asked for our documentation and waved us through with a “have a good day.” Growing up at the border, I don’t remember seeing any “wall” or personnel armed with weapons.

What I saw several years ago—and on my trips to the border since then—broke my heart. I witnessed people incarcerated for the sole crime of seeking hospitality and a new life in this country. I saw families torn apart, children separated from their parents, and a judicial system that offered little empathy or justice in mass hearings and deportations...every defendant handcuffed and chained to one another. The dejected and defeated looks on their faces still haunts me.

I cried when I heard and learned that U.S. citizens, “good Samaritans” who helped refugees/immigrants with water, food, and housing, run the risk of imprisonment if caught showing compassion and sheltering these refugees. They are harassed and threatened with violence. Barrels filled by them with water to help the thirsty traveler were shot at and were run dry by “patriots” claiming to protect “our country”.

When I share my experiences, I am always amazed with the response: “I hate what is happening to those children, but their parents are breaking the law, what can we do?”

In the Bible, Abraham bargains with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction for their arrogance and inhospitality—if ten righteous

people can be found. When the messengers of God visit the city of Sodom, Abraham's nephew Lot offers them hospitality and safety in his home. A mob of residents gathers and demands Lot hand over the messengers to them, to be harmed. The citizens are miffed that Lot, himself a "foreigner," has the audacity to stand up to them. The story does not end well for Sodom and Gomorrah.

I used to wonder how it was possible that ten righteous citizens couldn't be found to save the cities. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people." Is it possible that the good people of Sodom and Gomorrah were complicit in the inhospitable evil of their cities by remaining silent?

There is no question in my mind that how we are treating immigrants and refugees in our Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers is cruel and dehumanizing, and contrary to how our Christian faith calls us to be in relationship with each other. There is no such thing as an "illegal" person in the sight of the Divine.

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As a Christian I believe Jesus risked and paid the price for helping the marginalized and those considered the "enemy," and so must I. I refuse to be complicit. I refuse to only cry. I refuse to be silent.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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