



...and GOD was with the boy. Genesis 21:20

Traci Blackmon

Executive Minister, Justice & Local Church Ministries

I spent the last week of August at the border in Tucson, Arizona with the people of faith from across the ecumenical Body of Christ. We visited with migrant travelers who have jour-neyed through the desert and listened to the stories of those who search the migrant paths leaving water and supplies to help travelers along their way. We saw tables filled with relics found in the wilderness and now kept as sacred reminders of the danger of the journey. We crossed into Mexico and visited community centers that offer a meal, a phone call, respite, and care for those recently deported back to the place they tried so desperately to flee.

We shared communion at the border wall in Nogales, feet away from where 16-year-old Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez was killed by border control. We lamented the cost of brown skin and broken English in a world where white supremacy has falsely claimed the identity of god. We wondered aloud how we have strayed so far from the Way, and we strategized about how to find our way back. The days were long and yet, not long enough.

On the last day, we walked migrant paths in the desert, in sweltering heat, until we reached the memorial site of Miguel, a 26-year-old who dared to risk the journey in search of work. He died in August 2011. He died under a tree and the watchful eye of God. He died from dehydration. He died from the heat. He died from desperation. He died because he was poor. He died because we could not see.

As I stood at the site that marked his life I remembered the “forgotten one” of our sacred text, Ishmael. God was with Ishmael, the outcast son of Abraham. God was with his mother Hagar, too, an Egyptian slave woman whose body was not her own. Abraham forced both mother and son into a dessert with inadequate resources to live. He sent them with God but without enough water. He sent them with God but not enough bread. He sent them with God but without safe shelter. Hagar names God in this place, “Jehovah Roi,” God who sees. And not only does God see but God hears. The Bible says, “God heard the cries of the boy.”

Jon Levenson, a Jewish scholar, puts it this way, “Ishmael is read out of the covenant but emphatically included in the promise that is larger than the covenant.” In other words, no matter what the scripture says, Isaac was not Abraham’s only son.

And no matter what we tell ourselves, Miguel is not the only one. I wonder if God heard the cries of Miguel on that hot August day. Where were you, God, when his water ran out? Where were you when the brown boy died under the tree?

...and God was with the boy.

Perhaps I should ask, “Where were we?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Traci Blackmon is Executive Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

P.S. - The fellowship of border witnesses included the people of Good Shepherd UCC, delegations from nine of our thirty-eight conferences, members of our national staff, and representatives from the Disciples of Christ, Samaritan Ministries, American Baptist, and United Methodists. I am deeply indebted to Randy Mayer, William Lyons, Noel Anderson, and Nathan Watts for immersing us in the daily tasks of discipleship at the border, and educating us on this holy work they have engaged for the last twenty years.

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE
WFJ bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.