

From the wilderness

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Whenever the Israelites' "wilderness wandering" comes up, it presents a golden opportunity--especially in the current U.S. political climate --to talk about immigration.

This kind of preaching and teaching "with the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other" (as Karl Barth is said to have put it) provides at least two major advantages. It's an opportunity to consider and engage a major political issue in light of the gospel. It's also an opportunity to consider and engage Christian life in light of a major biblical and theological motif: the idea that every disciple is fundamentally a pilgrim, a "stranger in a strange land."

As far as immigration from the South is concerned, the reality is that our southern border is everywhere--it's not just along the far rim of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Undocumented workers' extremely low wages enable low prices in supermarket produce sections across the country, and a similar subsidizing effect is in place in a whole range of homestead industries: construction, housecleaning, landscaping, house painting and so on.

The U.S. standard of living depends on poor people who work for low wages and are often separated from their families for long periods of time because of immigration laws. Becoming more aware of these dynamics means becoming more aware of reality itself--and of the real consequences and costs of our everyday decisions.

It isn't for nothing that the Bible spends so much time reminding readers that they, too, were and so in some sense still are slaves, strangers, aliens in a foreign land. It's a point that might motivate us again and again to work to reform our society into

a more humane, self-aware, graceful place to live.