

May 10, Easter 6A (John 14:15–21; 1 Peter 3:13–22)

Blessed are the poor, in ways that make no earthly sense.

by [Laurel Mathewson](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue

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This past fall, I sat with an asylum seeker who was in tears over a new security device, a restrictive ankle monitor, that ICE had arbitrarily imposed (in more than two years, he had never missed a check-in appointment). The stigma, shame, and implicit threat of the monitor weighed heavily on this parishioner, who is already isolated from family and community by the very nature of seeking refuge abroad. He is a man steeped in scripture, full of 1 Peter's "gentleness and reverence," and so we talked about where he might turn for daily comfort. "Where do you see your situation reflected in the Bible?" I asked. "For you, where is the voice of the one who is persecuted though they have done nothing wrong? Where is the reminder that God sees you differently?"

"The psalms of David," he answered, still quietly weeping.

A seminary professor of mine taught us to value the Psalms in particular as a means of entering into a discomfiting and transformative solidarity with the persecuted, besieged, and suffering. Similarly, I had often read 1 Peter as a sort of clarifying exegesis of the civil rights movement, along with other nonviolent social movements around the world: "Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord

. . . [and] when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame." No longer needing to imagine much or draw historical connections, I found myself offering pastoral encouragement that echoed these sentiments: *You have broken no laws. You are suffering even though you've done what is right, proactively applying for asylum. Do not let this symbol of shame define or intimidate you. You know who you are before God; let scripture and God's Spirit remind you, every day.*

A couple months later, he was given a more discreet monitoring device as he continues to await his day in court. Yet, as of this writing, the careless intimidation tactics of this presidential administration's anti-immigrant policies remain a moral challenge to all residents of the United States, regardless of our citizenship status. "Even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed," says 1 Peter. The often hidden and usually paradoxical reality of the Beatitudes comes alive and to the surface, in ways we do not like and do not readily understand: Blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

One of the many blessings of serving a predominantly immigrant congregation for the past nine years has been an education in the diverse ways that individuals and families might come to be permanent residents and citizens of the United States. Most of our congregation arrived in this country through the refugee resettlement process, which requires one of the most rigorous vetting processes in the world. Some arrived as asylum seekers and declared themselves at the border, as required under international law. A few came as students or professors or married someone who had already made a life here. But this is an education I might have received outside the church, had I cared to. The greater gift has been simply to share the life of faith in a community of immigrants, simply because the faith of immigrants is great.

That's an overly bold statement, but hear me out. I'm aware there's a snide and condescending narrative out there that says their faith seems great because they haven't yet been exposed to the complexities of the modern world, or because they are clinging to colonial structures from the past that are at least familiar. Both are insulting lies. What I have been privileged to glimpse as an established American in "their" midst is more like the mysterious beauty and power of 1 Peter, the Beatitudes, and John 14:15–21 peeking out often from the everyday soil of our parish life. In this gospel passage, Jesus speaks to his disciples of the promised Holy Spirit (the Advocate, in legal terms!), who will abide with a (Johannine) community at the margins of its family system and established religious community. Knowing that they are indeed cut off from their ancestral trees, Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. . . . The world will no longer see me, but you will see me." In this passage of promised comfort and presence, Jesus speaks openly of mutual love: "Those who keep my commandments love me, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Jesus' love is for the whole world, but isn't it logical (and biblical) that those who have been displaced, cut off from land or family, would turn more often and more wholeheartedly to God? And that in that turning, with sincerity and often desperate trust, God loves and reveals himself with a graciousness we more established types often cannot see or even perhaps imagine? The measure given, the measure received: "I have no one but God," a leader in her 50s tells me plainly. "God loves me too much to let me die before I see my granddaughter turn one," a 48-year-old tells me from his hospital bed. "I may look like a widow, but I am married now to Jesus," an elder says, with a twinkle in her eye. Blessed are the poor, in ways that make no earthly sense. "This is the Spirit of truth," Jesus says. This is the reminder that God sees you, like Jesus, differently than the world sees, "because it neither sees him nor knows him."