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Immigration Reform and the Challenges of Generosity (Luke 4:22-30) Page 2

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Making Outsiders into Insiders

This passage reiterates a familiar biblical claim: God's grace extends to *all* corners of society. Simultaneously, the passage illustrates a too common human tendency to resist outsiders and their empowerment. In these respects, the passage offers perspective on the expanding conversations in the USA concerning immigration reform. The issue has been gathering momentum in political news during recent weeks and in the wake of [President Obama's speech in Las Vegas](#), much to the encouragement of [faith-based groups](#) that have persistently advocated for immigrant rights and benefits. And it recently received a boost from the media when [a coalition](#) of powerful Evangelical Christian organizations [indicated the issue will be a priority for them in the months to come](#).

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There are both political and religious reasons for Americans to consider immigration reform. These reasons call not only for revamping our immigration policies but also for making our society more welcoming to would-be immigrants and our laws more compassionate toward those who seek a better life here. The reasons are varied, though they occasionally intersect, especially when we assert the importance of economic vitality, promoting children's health and opportunities, keeping families together, and treating the disadvantaged with mercy instead of contempt.

But Luke's story about Jesus in Nazareth isn't finally about presenting Jesus as a model for niceness or fairness. Jesus' words and the crowd's response suggest that his ministry will empower many. Does that scare the folks in Nazareth? The thought of welcoming and empowering certain people toward citizenship scares many in America. Truly including newcomers will change the culture; it changes our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our most cherished institutions, and how we as a society will make future decisions. As we think through immigration reform, we need also to consider how we in the dominant culture cling to our

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privileges.

An authentically Christian call to action concerning how this nation treats and welcomes immigrants must go beyond issuing moral platitudes and encouraging compassionate treatment of the needy. It must also acknowledge society's ingrained resistance to empowering its "outsiders." Too often, whether in church or in civil society, those of us who hold advantages fear what we will lose them. Instead, imagine what we might all gain by promoting a culture of true hospitality and justice.

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