

Excerpt from "The Refugee Crisis and the Politics of Holy Week" by Matthew Kaemingk (<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-refugee-crisis-and-the-politics-of-holy-week/10094884>)

If high walls and open doors ultimately fail, let's consider the alternative political vision of Holy Week. In five critical spaces, Jesus demonstrates his alternative "politics of hospitality."

THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM

With raucous chanting, singing and waving palm branches, Palm Sunday begins Holy Week with a note of frenetic jubilation. The crowds of Jerusalem loved the "idea" of the Jesus movement. They loved the "idea" of being a part of a popular and charismatic campaign of justice and grace. However, a few days later, when things became difficult and dangerous, when the true cost and sacrifice of the movement was made known, the crowd quickly dispersed.

Today, many Americans, particularly on the left, love the "idea" of a refugee movement for justice and hospitality. But are they prepared to open themselves and their homes up to the true cost and the deep challenge of what will come? Are these liberals willing to have very conservative Muslims living in their neighborhoods or attending their schools? The echoes of Palm Sunday and Holy Week remind us that political movements are often fleeting and deep hospitality will cost something dear.

THE UPPER ROOM

In preparation for the last supper, Jesus demonstrates the true cost of his hospitality. He goes beyond simply opening the door for his guests. He humbly disrobes, kneels and washes their feet. Christ's hospitality is not abstract; it is not theoretical; it is embodied, and its subjects are covered in mud, sweat, dust and animal excrement; it is something that is lowly and unimpressive by the world's standards.

In the upper room, Jesus offers his guests more than an open door or even washed feet; he invites the disciples to share his table, and he ultimately offers his guests his very self - his body and blood. Christ's hospitality involves more than the "idea" of openness; it involves the actual breaking open of his own body.

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

After supper, Jesus goes out to the Mount of Olives with his disciples to pray. Soon after, a band of soldiers and servants of the high priest arrive to arrest Jesus. Coming to bind the hands of Jesus, a slave named Malchus is suddenly attacked by Peter, who cuts off

Malchus's ear. How does Jesus respond? He not only rebukes Peter's violence, he reaches out to heal the ear of the man who came to arrest him.

It is not uncommon today for those on the right to claim that Muslims are coming to attack, bind and "take over" the West, and therefore we need to build higher walls, construct our defenses and attack our enemies. This story of Malchus offers an interesting rebuke to this politics of fear. Malchus is clearly and openly coming to attack Jesus, to take his freedom away and lead him to his death. How does Jesus respond to this aggression? Does he respond with violence? Does Jesus seek first his own security? No, Jesus reaches out his unarmed hand to heal the one who comes to injure. Jesus reaches out to liberate the one who comes to bind.

Many Christians would quickly argue that national security in a violent world often requires a coercive defense - and they are certainly right. However, the story of Malchus still stands. Christ the new king of Israel faces violent evil and challenges every other earthly king to remember that "security" is not the ultimate end of politics. The ultimate end of politics is relationship. In the shadow of the Mount of Olives, Christians do not seek national security *from the refugee* - no, we seek national security *for relationship with the refugee*.

THE HILL OF GOLGOTHA

The early church father, Cyril of Jerusalem, said that on Golgotha, God himself "stretched out His hands on the Cross, that He might embrace the ends of the world; *for this Golgotha is the very center of the earth.*" Likewise, the contemporary theologian [Hans Boersma](#) notes: "Christ's death and resurrection constitute the ultimate expression of God's hospitality." On Golgotha, the Son of God displays a grotesque and beautiful openness to the pain and injustice of the world. Here Jesus illustrates the ultimate image and cost of hospitality in a world of violence and hatred.

While we often think that human beings stripped Christ naked and exposed him on Golgotha, the theologian Klaas Schilder disagrees. He argues that it was human beings who were bared for all too see in Golgotha. The cross does not expose Jesus - it exposes us. On the cross, humanity is forced to look on its own naked aggression, fear and violence.

In the West, we like to paint ourselves as civilized and peaceful, and we like to paint refugees (especially Muslims) as uncivilized and dangerous. The cross exposes *all of us* as a common species that is capable of great evil and violence. While this is certainly sobering news, Golgotha offers words of comfort as well. Christ does not leave humanity

naked, shivering and cold in our aggression and sin. Though we stole his clothes from him in violence, Jesus clothes us with himself in peace.

As Christians, we can be tempted to congratulate ourselves for showing hospitality to refugees, to somehow imagine that our good deeds come from some sort of inherent moral superiority. Golgotha says "No!" We clothe the refugee because Christ first clothed us. We open our arms for the refugee because Christ opened his arms for us.

AN EMPTY TOMB, AND A BEACH

If Golgotha demands that we open ourselves up to a dangerous world, the empty tomb promises that our hospitality is not in vain. The empty tomb ensures that the ultimate end of hospitality is not suffering and pain but joy and delight. Ever the host, Jesus ends the story preparing a meal for his friends on the beach.