



## Justice and Advocacy Week: Asylum Seekers and Refugees

**Sherry Maddock**

### **Who's my family?**

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 - <sup>17</sup> For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, <sup>18</sup> who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Belonging has different terms under the lordship of Christ. In addition to the world being re-defined, who am I and who's mine are transformed. It's a shake up and it turns upside down who's in and who's out. Relationships are restored and new families are crafted.

During the darkest days of 2020's lockdown, connection was almost impossible, the logistics of care complicated. In my work to help vulnerable women with very few resources, I had to repeatedly check in with the question, "what do you need?" In these moments, it was the language of family that helped the most. In plain-spoken, simple English, I resorted to saying, "you are my sister - your needs are my needs."

Who's my kin? This is an ancient question that is alive with us today. The pandemic has separated blood relatives across thousands of miles and national borders. Fixed in place, sometimes with only 5km to go, the person of neighbour became central. Here in Victoria, some of our neighbours are at risk for homelessness, stateless and without a promised future. There are 12,000 people seeking asylum in our state alone, many of them in limbo for more than a decade. Just like refugees, people seeking asylum have fled war, persecution and unliveable human circumstances. People seeking asylum lack safety, familiarity and agency. They are in search of survival, welcome and belonging. They are here in Australia with nowhere else to turn. They are the most vulnerable in our midst.

In Scripture, we find a fierce love in God for the stranger, the orphan and the widow. It is devout and preferential. It is covenantal and unwavering. It is offered by Yahweh, the One who delivers, and it is demanded radically of the people of God. Mandated and unequivocal, we are instructed to offer hospitality and care on family terms to the most vulnerable, like that of a brother or sister.

From the book about biblical kinship by brothers Mark and Luke Glanville, "Refuge Reimagined," we get the call to enfold. Caught up in this are the privileged activities of welcome, protection and inclusion. As we are enfolded by God through Christ, we get to do the work of enfolding the vulnerable foreigner in our midst. Of this they write:

"Deuteronomy is transforming relationships between insiders and outsiders in the direction of kinship. Yahweh is the divine Kinsperson, and as strangers



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share in the feast 'before Yahweh your God,' even consuming the sacred tithe, they are incorporated within the very family of Yahweh. Deuteronomy's vision for the stranger is that she or he is to be grafted into the household, the clan, and the nation."

### **For reflection:**

1. In line with God's commands, think deeply about the question "who's my family?"
2. Ask God to reveal to you how you can join Him in the work of 'enfolding the vulnerable foreigner in our midst'
3. Think about ways that you or your church could respond with love and faithfulness to care for people seeking asylum

**Bio:** Sherry Maddock is neighbourhood engagement coordinator at Collins St Baptist Church and gardener with small non-profit, Planted Places.