



Loving the Stranger by Rebecca Rider

Last month I had the opportunity to serve the Afghan Refugees at Massanetta. As the day approached I mulled over the possibilities the evening would bring. As an elementary teacher I wanted to be able to connect with the children; as a woman I wanted to be able to connect with these women who were now in a free country that would (hopefully) embrace them. I eventually decided that I would bring various boxes of crayons and markers, paper, and several children's books from our own collection. Knowing that not all children like to sit for an activity (have you met mine?) I wondered about bringing a bag of balloons to blow up and toss around. No English required for an old fashioned game of "keep it up!". The day we were scheduled to serve was busy and hectic and I only had 45 minutes until it was time to leave. I had not yet purchased the balloons but felt an urging that it was necessary and made a quick trip out to the store. As we served dinner shortly I watched as men filed in to gather supper for their families. Few children or women showed up. Finally a young, rambunctious boy came in with his mother. They gathered their food but didn't sit down to eat. As they waited for volunteers to bring out more yogurt I saw my chance and approached them. His mother spoke English quite well and I asked her if I could read to him. We read a few stories and chatted in between. I discovered that his fifth birthday was only two days away. "I don't know how we will celebrate here though," his mother remarked as she looked around their temporary home. I asked, "Well, how would you celebrate in Afghanistan?" unsure of what their cultural customs for birthdays were. She replied, "Oh, balloons and cake." Wait! I had balloons! I excitedly rifled through my bag and pulled out the balloons that I had felt so important to purchase only a few hours prior. I handed them to her, wishing I had more to give to this woman. She had actually given me far more than I had given her. I learned that we have more in common than our differences with these strangers from a foreign land. In his book "Making Room" Ed Robb teaches about how Christ and his family were refugees in a foreign land when they fled to Egypt. In Leviticus 19:33-34 God instructs the Israelites "When a foreigner resides among you in your land do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." The "issue" of immigration has become a political one but it is first and foremost a biblical one. We do not need to agree on political borders but as believers we must have love that knows no boundaries.

Dear Almighty God,

Teach me your ways, that I may love all of your children the way you do. Help me to not fear the stranger but see the connections between us. Open my eyes to the strangers around me that I could show the love of Christ to. Amen