

"Come to Me, All You That Are Weary"
A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki on the 250th anniversary of Our Nation
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2026
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

"Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" –
Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 11:28

*"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"* From the sonnet "The New Colossus" written by
Emma Lazarus in 1883, inscribed on a plaque next to the Statue of Liberty in 1903.

Otis Redding sang in 1966, "Oh, she may be weary/young girls they do get wearied", but it isn't only young girls who get wearied, all of us do. You may be weary right now – the heat's been getting to you and you aren't sleeping well, too much 4th of July celebrating yesterday, physical issues, emotional strain, family problems – oh yes we all do get weary, Otis, but that's not the kind of weariness Jesus or Emma were talking about.

Who are the "weary" that Jesus invites to come to him? If we go back to earlier in Matthew's gospel, the Beatitudes promise blessings precisely to those who find themselves disadvantaged, outnumbered, or at risk in this predatory world. His words about providing "rest for your souls" are not principally directed to people with comfortable lives; read them instead as restatements of the Beatitudes.

Who was Emma Lazarus and who are the "weary" that she saw? Emma was a woman, meaning she had no right to vote and a Sephardic Jew meaning she experienced serious anti-Semitic bias. She lived at 18 W. 10th Street in New York City, a stone's throw to Castle Garden at the southern tip of Manhattan where immigrants were processed by the State of New York before the opening of Ellis Island in 1892. As such she would have seen over 8 million immigrants embark into her section of Manhattan from 1855 to 1890. Was she resentful? Did she call for the building of ICE Detention Centers? The repeal of birthright citizenship? The poem suggests not. While her family was wealthy, she also understood discrimination.

Here's a news flash and the most shocking statement I will make today. Every one of us here is an immigrant unless you have a significant amount of ancestry from indigenous peoples and, if you do, I apologize for not knowing. My ancestors on my mother's side, the Lemke family, came from Polish Prussia in the 1860s. They came to Detroit in large waves escaping harsh imperial repression, forced cultural assimilation (Germanisation), chronic unemployment, land shortages, and devastating global wars. They settled in predominantly Polish neighborhoods in the lower east-side of Detroit.

Karen's ancestors on her father's side came from Ireland, precisely the Knockmealdown Mountains of south central Ireland and Bere Island off the southwest coast. They were part of a large wave of Irish immigrants who experienced potato blight and mass evictions from their land by absentee British landlords. They eventually settled in north central Massachusetts amidst many other Irish immigrants. The bottom-line lesson: people don't leave their homelands to immigrate to another unless things are really, really bad.

Did our ancestors always get welcomed with open arms? No, there has been ethnic bias and hatred toward every immigrant group that has landed in this country. I grew up where the most common form of ethnic humor was the "Polak" joke, which made the assumption that Poles were on the low end of the IQ spectrum. But we were still let in, when we landed we were allowed to attain citizenship and earn a living as hard as that was at times.

As we remember our 250th anniversary as a nation, there is certainly much to celebrate over these years but it is also a time to take stock, to be honest about where we have fallen short of the ideals of our Constitution, ("We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal") and as people of faith, we say that we have fallen short of the ideals of our gospel. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus say, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me". Today we hear Jesus say "Come to me all you who are weary". But also today we are facing a rebellion against our founding principle as a few people seek to reshape America into a nation in which certain people are better than others, an idea against the very core of our national principles and our gospel values.

On June 25, the Supreme Court removed the temporary protection status for 350,000 Haitians and 5,000 Syrians who have lived and worked legally in the US for years. And this past week while that same court upheld the principle of birthright citizenship, there

is still the threat of Congress enacting legislation to remove it. Over the course of the Easter Season, we all attested to the baptismal promise to “uphold the dignity of every human being”. How does this square with so many actions the government and courts have taken recently?

So yes “come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden”, unless of course you’re from Haiti and have bought a house in the country, paid taxes and raised children and then we will send you back to a country where you may not even speak the language. Nursing homes and home care facilities in many parts of the country are terrified because a disproportionate number of health workers are Haitian – on the front lines, caring for our older relatives.

So yes, “come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden”, unless ICE finds you and despite your having legal papers to be here, you might get sent to a Detention Center where according to Physicians for Human Rights you will be given no or inadequate medical care, as well as living in unsanitary conditions with inadequate food which contribute to disease.

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church last week issued a statement:

“The Episcopal Church will continue supporting immigrants and asylum seekers in all of our ministries. We will advocate for laws and policies that center welcome, protection from harm, and integration. The Episcopal Church is a home to immigrants, and Episcopalians across the country and around the world continue to minister to and walk alongside migrants in need. We will continue to uphold the dignity of refugees and migrants following the biblical call to welcome the stranger.”

“Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me”; “Come to me all you who are weary”.

We honor both our nation in celebrating our 250th and our faith, when we remember the values on which they are founded, when we walk alongside the disenfranchised and vulnerable, when we remember the words next to the Statue of Liberty, “give me your tired and your poor”.