

TRINITY LECTURE - National Identity and Immigration

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 September 2007

Preacher: Jo Knight

[0 : 00] Speaker tonight, Jo Knight, began her passion for social justice in her teenage years, learning about the issues concerning East Timor.

And in her growing understanding of the partnership of faith in Christ and working for justice in the world. She chose to study arts law and in her degree put a focus on international relations, human rights and development, completing honours in both degrees on people from the developing world.

Now Jo works as an immigration lawyer with Erskine Roden and Associates. And Erskine Roden is a leading firm specialising only in immigration.

Not only does Jo work in the area, but she spends significant volunteer time in two very important ways. Firstly, as the president of the Oak Tree Foundation, you may have heard of the Oak Tree Foundation through the Make Poverty History campaign.

The Oak Tree Foundation is an entirely youth-run aid and development agency, and it's become the peak youth voice in Australia on issues of poverty.

[1 : 23] Not only does Jo spend her time with Oak Tree, but also she's the chair of the Refugee Law Reform Committee and a member of the Migration Committee through the Law Institute of Victoria.

So we're very privileged to have Jo Knight with us this evening. Please make her welcome, Jo. Thank you very much for having me.

I do like the opportunity to be able to speak on an area like this because it's something I'm passionate about, and I do see it very closely related to my faith, and I really want to share that with other Christians and help them engage in issues that affect our society.

So thank you very much. I guess as we've seen from tonight's Bible study, you don't need to open the Bible very far to see there's plenty that God has to say about the vulnerable in our society and also the outsider, the foreigner, that might be in our midst.

I think that if perhaps Amos or Habakkuk were to be prophesying today, they might have some things to say about the way Australia treats people from overseas.

[2 : 41] But we'll explore some of that in detail soon. As Megan was saying, I work as an immigration lawyer. I feel very privileged to be able to be helping people and to be able to be using my skills and my education, which is so ridiculous in Australia, the opportunities we have for education, to be able to use that to interpret what is a very complicated legal system for people that are from non-English speaking backgrounds and be part of that process, that journey for them of resettling and finding peace and getting on with their lives.

So I really enjoy that sort of work and the compassionate and the discretionary factors, fighting for those sort of things. So I would be more than happy to talk to anyone at the end about some of the cases and what that looks like.

Thank you. Thank you. I'm also married to Peter Caroline, who's very kindly doing the PowerPoint out the back.

Peter and I are at St Hillary's Anglican Church across in Kew, and Peter heads up the Youth and Young Adults Congregation. So that's been my church home for about 10 years now, and I'll chat a little bit tonight about some of the ways our community has been able to respond to these issues.

Immigration is a very large topic, and I'm not sure what your expectations are when you come to a session tonight, what you think I might be able to get through or talk about.

[4 : 12] I'm going to, I guess, just confine ourselves to a few issues, and even then I'll have to be general by the nature of a short time together. But we're going to look at two main questions.

The first being, should we be excluding others from coming to our land? And the second one is, should people's rights be limited when they're seeking to remain in Australia?

Before I get into these, let me give you a little bit of a background about Australia's immigration system in its simplest form to help us sort of be on the same page. As I said, it's a very complicated legal system.

The laws are changed frequently. I think most Australians who are not legally trained find it pretty complicated. So if you're a non-English speaker, it's fairly inaccessible. If you don't get the right advice early on at the right time, any options for review are fairly limited and doors close as soon as you've started taking steps or lodging applications.

So it's very important that people get advice early. Australia's immigration system can be broadly understood through two ways that people come to settle in Australia.

[5 : 32] The first one would be the migration program. The migration program is by far the place where most of the visas are. It covers all the skilled visas and family visas.

In terms of numbers, we're talking about 143,000 places each year and the bulk of them are for skilled migrants. So those that Australia says can contribute in positive ways to our economy.

So if we can just have the next slide to the figures. So you'll see that 97,000 places in the skilled stream and the remainder for the family stream.

So it's by far the place where most of the visas are available. If we jump to the other way someone might come to settle in Australia, which is the humanitarian, the refugee and humanitarian stream, we're talking about only about 13,000 places a year.

So quite a difference to the 143,000 that we looked at. Now, for the 13,000 places, over 100,000 people will apply. So it's a bit like a lottery in the way it operates.

[6 : 45] Those 100,000 people are largely overseas, either in camps or having fled their home country. And either the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or a family member or sponsor in Australia will put forward their application.

Most people are in that lottery for years on end and may be rejected many, many times and then without much reason or any understanding of why they might be accepted, but they also may not be.

So that's where most people are applying for to come to Australia under the humanitarian program. Those that are in Australia through either arriving by boat or someone who's already in Australia on some other sort of visa who claims protection in Australia only makes up about 10%.

So we're only looking at about 1,200, 1,300 places per year that are taken by boat people or asylum seekers in Australia. So we're talking about quite small numbers when you look at the political impact that some of these small groups of people have had in Australia's recent history.

I'm going to mainly focus on those that actually come into our midst, so whether they've been coming by boat or they're here in some way.

[8 : 06] So that's going to be my focus tonight as we work through some of these questions. Now, I've said that we'll try and explore two ethical dilemmas.

I'm not a theologian. I'm a lawyer. But I guess I want to share with you some of the biblical perspectives I've learnt that have helped me in responding and understanding these questions.

So I'm sure there's a lot more discussion that we can have at the end. The first question, should we be excluding others from coming to our land? Now, as with any ethical question, the answers are not straightforward.

I think before we focus on the ethically difficult examples, we might be able to come to an understanding that there would be some situations where we would expect our leaders to exclude people from our land.

I've got just a couple. Perhaps someone that is intent on destroying our society. Perhaps it might be our democratic society here in Australia. That might be one reason that we say, OK, maybe that person should be excluded.

[9 : 16] Another one might be someone that's been involved in serious criminal or terror activities. And even at the end of World War II, when the countries created the Refugees Convention, that was always an exclusion, that the countries said, yes, if someone's been a war criminal or involved in something like that, then that's not someone that we'd want to have come in our midst.

The other would be, if someone has a health condition, that by bringing it to Australia, we would likely have a pandemic of a particular health disease. That might again be an example when we would ethically say it is appropriate to exclude them.

Now, the lawyer in me says, I want to get into the details of that. And I think of the recent Hanif case and the way the character provisions were used. And I want to, I guess, go into further detail and understand what we, if we were to exclude people, what would it look like?

But I guess for brevity's sake and simplicity, perhaps if I assume that we can agree that there are some situations where we might exclude people, and then if we look at the other end of the spectrum, which would be the humanitarian claims, and the sort of cases which I would expect us to agree that we should at least consider those claims.

The next step would be, well, how do we consider those claims? What do we take into consideration when looking at that end of the spectrum? So let's move there now.

[10 : 43] Let me tell you about two important events in our recent immigration history concerning people coming to our borders from overseas.

I want you to think back to Australia in August 2001, so six years ago almost exactly. There was an election looming.

The government was not looking particularly favourable in the poll. And then a boat appeared on the horizon, much like many other boats, but this one was propelled to the centre of the political stage.

This boat was called the Tampa. The election then essentially turned on issues of border protection.

So it was August 2001. The captain of a ship called the Tampa, a Norwegian captain, picked up a group of people who were in distress on the high sea following his seafaring traditions.

[11 : 47] The number of people he rescued was 438 people. And the vessel they'd been in was on its way from Indonesia to Australia and then began to sink.

The group of people were a group called Hazaras, which is a minority ethnic group landlocked in the middle of Afghanistan. So they were fleeing the Taliban.

When the captain sought to land those people on Christmas Island, which is one of Australia's islands, the Australian government refused to let him land.

And there was a large standoff which played out in the media. So it became a diplomatic standoff between Australia, who said we won't let them land, and Indonesia, who has not signed the Refugees Convention, so doesn't have international law obligations to these people.

And the boat continued to be in the sea with these people on deck of a boat that wasn't equipped to have nearly 500 people. On the 29th of August 2001, the government tried to pass some very radical laws in the Senate that would have had an effect that was backdated to do some, I guess, unprecedented things.

[13 : 11] Now, they didn't succeed with this particular law, but it would have given them the power to remove ships from Australian territorial waters, essentially denying anyone to be able to claim asylum.

But what the government did pass was legislation that excised many of Australia's coastal islands, so said for our purposes, any of the islands don't count, and the territorial waters.

So now we claim that Australia, the sovereign state, covers the mainland and the islands, but for migration purposes, we'll cut off the islands and we'll just talk about the mainland.

That's essentially what's happened through those laws and some subsequent ones. The asylum seekers stuck on the Tampa never reached the Australian mainland and they were sent instead to Nauru, which, of course, is another country and also has not signed the Refugees Convention.

So this is what the government called the Pacific Solution. It was part of the Pacific Solution to take people to Nauru. The people that were on the Tampa were held indefinitely in Nauru and their applications were eventually processed and I'll explain to you what happened to them in the end.

[14 : 36] In terms of a timeline, two weeks after the Tampa incident, we had the bombing of the World Trade Centre, the 9-11-2001 bombing, and all of a sudden border protection issues started to be linked up in all the language with those of national security and terrorism.

Less than a month later, we had a situation, which you might remember, the children overboard incident. It was where there were images presented to the public by the politicians of asylum seekers dumping children into the sea.

Now, sometime later, the Senate did a very thorough investigation and it was... None of those things were occurring, but by then the political mileage had, you know, had been won and when Senate committees find things a year or two later, no-one seems to care that much.

But we had the children overboard incident following on from the Tampa. 11 days after the children overboard incident, 353 Iraqi and Afghani asylum seekers died just off Australia's waters.

There remains controversy as to how much Australia knew or whether we could have saved those people, but it was a timeline of fairly dramatic events. The next slide we have is a quote that characterised the Howard government's approach this time, which was John Howard saying, we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances upon which they come.

[16 : 13] Australia then went to vote at the election, an election dominated by this issue, and the acceptance speech was, again, along the lines of this quote.

While Australia... these issues raged in Australia, we had troops in both Afghanistan fighting the Taliban and we had forces in the region where Iraq is, and the people that were at the centre of these, Tampa and other incidents, were people who had fled those regimes, so Afghans and Iraqis that had fled those regimes.

In terms of what happened to the people on the Tampa, of the 438, only 28 ever made it to Australia, and that was after being detained for many years in Nauru.

New Zealand welcomed most of them, and that happened almost immediately. New Zealand had a very different approach to Australia, and the rest went to Scandinavia and North America. Now, I have a short clip from Malcolm Fraser, which is Malcolm Fraser reflecting on this period in Australia's history.

I'd like to go back, I think, to the Tampa election, and the government wasn't very popular at the time, not because of Tampa, but because of other things.

[17 : 34] It was trailing in the polls and looked like losing an election. The government needed an issue on which it could win an election. And so over a considerable period, boat people were really demonised.

You know, these are awful people. They'll be prostitutes, they'll be peddling drags, they're thieves, they're queue-junkers. They're not good people.

But again, on the record, of boat people, the overwhelming majority, have been found to be genuine refugees when it had really been looked at closely.

OK. The next main episode that I'd like to share with you is the arrival in 2006 of a boatload of West Papuans and the political fallout that occurred after that.

So in January 2006, 43 West Papuans asylum seekers made it across the waters to the Australian mainland. They miraculously survived at sea and they were only in a 25-metre traditional dugout canoe that they had made in the jungle.

[18 : 49] And it had an outboard motor. Now, the claims of this group were strong. They were taken to Christmas Island, but they were processed fairly quickly and granted temporary refugee status.

Now, my church at St. Hillary's in Kew has had the privilege of having many of this West Papuan group come into our midst and be part of our church community. And what you're seeing is their home video of them coming.

This is before their motor broke and they were lost on the high seas without enough food and water. But this is when their spirits are still pretty high. The story of the West Papuans is that this group had been involved in a peaceful demonstration to raise the cause of a free West Papua and had been chased into the jungle by the Indonesian militia.

You'll see that there are children among the group as well. They spent around four months hiding in the jungle, living off bush foods, and then built this raft. When they landed in Cape York on the beach in Australia, they didn't know, because they'd been lost at sea for so many days, they didn't know if they'd hit another part of Papua or East Timor or Australia until they were picked up and then transported to Christmas Island.

Now, Indonesia strongly disapproved of Australia's grant of refugee protection to the West Papuans and there was a lot of diplomatic pressure.

[20 : 22] Commentators vary, but shortly afterwards, Australia proposed some laws. The current government proposed some laws which would radically strengthen Australia's border protection and would have meant people like that West Papuan group who got to the mainland could not have even applied for asylum.

There was great community pressure and discussion over these laws. They were complicated, but they were radical. And after great community pressure, the people that, I guess, held the vote ended up being Senator Judith Troth from the Liberal Party at Backbencher and Senator Steve Fielding from the Family First Party.

So, in the very end, the law was sidelined, but the intention of the government had been clear of what it wanted to do. We'll just look at a quote that Senator Steve Fielding has up on the screen.

I'll just read it for you because it is a little bit hard to read back there. There are rules about the treatment of asylum seekers which are accepted by all countries, yet suddenly Australia says, not us.

How can Australia expect India and Pakistan to accept Afghan boat people, yet boot people who reach our country off to a foreign land? It's a case of one rule for Australia and another for everyone else.

[21 : 53] And that's not on. If every country followed Australia's lead, made up their own rules and booted people off to foreign lands, there would be absolute chaos.

Australia has no control over what happens on Maru, so effectively would be washing its hands of any boat people and adopting an attitude of out of sight, out of mind.

It's not fair and it's not right. So that was the main statement that Steve Fielding gave after saying he would not support the particular bill. As I reflect on these two landmark episodes in Australia's recent immigration history, I'm saddened by the blatant injustice of Australia's response.

In a globalised world, Australia is able to enjoy the fruits of globalisation, of the free flow of money, of trade, and in unprecedented economic wealth.

But when it comes to the issue of border protection and of people from other parts of the world coming in our midst, we have taken an extremely severe approach, unlike many other countries that we would say are similar Western countries, as we have tried to fortress the nation but yet accept the free flow of money and everything else as if there were no borders.

[23 : 24] One of the driving forces behind my desire to be an immigration lawyer is my Christian response to injustice. I'm highly educated and I can use these skills to be a voice to the voiceless and respond to God's call.

Many of the people that I work with have been denied fair processes and are not particularly happy that they've had to leave their homeland but they're here and I can be part of them working through the system and seeking to get on with their lives.

We've looked at some very relevant passages in Deuteronomy tonight and I'd like to just look at in brief some biblical principles as I've learnt them as I've engaged with these issues.

So the first gospel principle that I'd look at is God says that we should be fair and just to the foreigner in our midst. Now there are many Old Testament references to foreigners or aliens and we've looked at some of them tonight.

I've got a couple of verses that I'll just read out briefly. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born.

[24 : 49] Love him as yourself for you are aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. So again picking up on the remembering the time in Egypt. Leviticus. Numbers 15.15 The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you.

This is a lasting ordinance for generations to come you and the alien shall be the same before the Lord. Deuteronomy 27.1 another example Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien the fatherless or the widow.

Then all the people shall say Amen. As we see from the first of the examples in Leviticus God's law about the treatment of foreigners does look back to the time where Israel was in Egypt.

So Israel had I guess no excuse for a lack of empathy because they had been there themselves and had experienced what it was like to have good times in Egypt but then to be oppressed.

The stories and others like it from the Old Testament form a pattern in salvation history that God's heart is for the vulnerable the poor the widow the foreigner the outsider in the New Testament the tax collector the sinner and Jesus comes for those who are sick who need a doctor therefore our heart should be shaped like God's heart and it's the heart which I would challenge you is about action we are called to be God called by God to have an active response to injustice not passive acceptance but something active let's look at Deuteronomy 10 18 and 19 he defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the alien giving him food and clothing and you are to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt now next let's look at the verbs or the doing words in God's rebuke to a sinful Israel who were in a state of rebellion sin and injustice from Isaiah 1 17

[27 : 15] I've bolded them to make it helpful learn to do right seek justice encourage the oppressed defend the cause of the fatherless plead the case of the widow the biblical call to seek justice is an active thing and requires something from us in Australia that's likely to make us uncomfortable and is likely to be countercultural but I would challenge you tonight to think about how you can be uncomfortable and how you can take an active step and respond at my church across young and old it's a big church so there's many ages we've had to learn a lot about Australia's immigration laws and what it means to come on a boat and a lot about the issues of West Papua because we've had the privilege of having many of that group in our church community many of the West

Papuans have joined and they're living with different families at the church and there are many at the church involved in helping teach English as well as learning about some of the human rights abuses and struggles that are going on in West Papua there's a group of mainly older people from the congregation that are heading to West Papua later in the year to learn first hand what it's like over there my congregation of youth and young adults has taken our response in the form of letter writing to our politicians and making our voice heard so when the laws in 2006 were proposed to radically change border protection together as a community we wrote letters to engage with the issues and write to our politicians and different members of the community called up personally some of the politicians to share their feelings and thoughts and try and hear the thought process that our politicians were going through as they decided whether or not to support these laws

I think many Christians in the mainstream church can think that all they need to concern themselves about is their own personal salvation and that they don't need to bother with these sort of issues that we've been thinking about tonight even more I can see some Australian Christians being quite protective of their blessings which we happen to have because we were born here in Australia and not necessarily wanting to share that abundance with others.

It may sound controversial but I don't think it is that the mainstream church is largely made up in Australia of upwardly mobile middle class Australians and I would challenge you tonight to think about how conservative politics and conservative theology can often unthinkingly be linked and it may be time to try and unpack some of those things as we look at some of the biblical themes of justice and love for our neighbour.

So I guess I challenge you that there are times to stand up for justice and be a voice and to take active steps in our context in Australia.

[30 : 51] Tomorrow night you'll hear a lecture with Gordon on William Wilberforce and some of the steps that William Wilberforce took 200 years ago with the anti-slavery movement.

At the time he was very unpopular but history shows the great legacy that he has left for our world and so much more work that can be done in that area.

So to stand up may not be popular but if our eyes are set on Jesus then we are following in the right path and we will not be swayed. So I guess I would say that I think there are many times where we should be accepting people and processing them in a fair way in Australia.

So I would challenge you to think about being a change maker. Think about writing letters. think about learning about these issues and think about the way your public life and the life here in Australia is interrelated with your faith.

life. At this point I will quickly plug an event that I'm part of through the Law Institute as an example of a way that you can easily learn more about some of these issues.

[32 : 15] There is an event next week on the future of Australia's refugee policy. The Law Institute has been very lucky to get some very well-known panellists. So there will be four experts discussing these issues and a range of issues and questions from the floor at the State Library next week.

So if you're interested feel free to grab some more information from me. But it's a simple way of learning some more about issues and engaging in something that's important in Australia.

Let's turn now to our second dilemma and the question of should people's rights be limited when they seek to stay in Australia.

The most dramatic way that Australia limits people's rights is through our policy of mandatory detention. That is mandatory detention of asylum seekers who are arrived here without either correct paperwork or an existing visa.

The High Court of Australia has confirmed that the way the laws are written is that mandatory detention can be indefinite. Countless experts have looked at the way that Australia's policies of mandatory detention have led to the psychological breakdown of many people and that the solutions are not necessarily reached in terms of a public policy perspective.

[33 : 59] Most of the detention centres have been either located in the desert, parts of Australia or outside on offshore islands or in the case of Nauru in another country.

So essentially taking that and making it out of sight and out of mind. I've got a short clip which is a reflection of two people that have been involved as professionals on the inside of the mandatory detention system.

I was a detention services officer at Baxter and prior to that I was at the Maribyrdong detention centre. I worked at Baxter for nearly two years.

The depression is just terrible. It's a terrible thing. And the not knowing when it's all going to finish or how it's going to finish is probably the worst thing.

They haven't been given the luxuries of someone who's been sentenced for a crime. They know when it's going to finish but these guys and girls they don't know. And that in the space of my time in detention the people that I've known for that period of time I've seen them decline in terrible ways, heartbreaking ways.

[35 : 14] People have physically become sick or lost weight or their mind has changed and that's really sad.

That's very, very sad because these people have a lot to offer. I think the medical side of things is very worrying. I know one elderly or middle aged man complained about a stomach problem and he complained for quite some time and they only gave him Mylanta and Panadol and as it happened he has cancer.

There's a chronic fear of being returned to a situation in which they've fled persecution. So anxiety, depression is pretty uniform and often this depression is extremely severe.

Self-harm is obviously very, very common in these settings and it's always labelled as a manipulative sort of thing but it's not. It's actually very common in any detained populations, even in normal prisons actually.

It's a pretty unbearable experience in definite detention. I think any normal person would find it intolerable after it. And there's much that could be said about immigration detention and it could be a topic in itself.

[36 : 35] So I can't talk about much tonight except to flag it as one of the ways that we affect people's rights when they seek to remain in Australia.

What I find interesting about Australians' reaction to detention is the outcry and the reaction when Australian Cornelia Rao and Australian Vivian Alvarez Salom were found to have been illegally detained and with Vivian Alvarez to have been illegally deported from Australia.

The Ombudsman then went on to investigate more cases and found 247 cases of wrongful detention involving Australians. But as Christians the question I would ask is should we be comfortable with two sets of two standards, one for Australians where we're outraged that they would be detained and one for the non-Australian who is detained?

What basis would we have for outrage for one and not for the other? If injustice is injustice, surely it is injustice whoever experiences it. I would like to propose I guess a short alternative to mandatory detention and I'm not original in this, there are many who also would agree with this model.

I would operate under a principle that detention should operate for the shortest period of time and as a last resort.

[38 : 15] I agree with the need for there to be initial processing of health and identity checks but these sort of things can be done in a number of weeks and then the people can be released into the community just like many asylum seekers are in our community.

It's just they happen to have some form of visa when they first arrived here such as a visitor visa. So it's not like we haven't tried it and seen how it would work in Australia and there are many other models around the world for this initial processing for health and identity but still keeping it at the shortest possible period of time.

Before I again look at some biblical perspectives I just want to talk about another significant issue when we talk about Australia curtailing someone's rights when they seek to remain here and that is the condition that we impose on people which is the no work condition.

In 1997 a regulation was passed which denied many people the right to work and any rights to Medicare or income support while they were seeking asylum or for many other people elsewhere in their immigration process in Australia.

I'll try and explain how the law works through a story of Shana's story. So Shana had to flee her country, her life was in danger in South East Asia and she had to flee to Australia leaving everything behind including two young adult children.

[39 : 59] She got to Australia and found someone from her people group that she started to live with, to stay with. But by the time she found some legal help it was around two months after the time she'd got to Australia.

It was only then that she was informed that because she had taken more than 45 days to make an application as a refugee, she could enjoy no work rights and no other form of Medicare.

Shana's friend who was kind enough to let her stay took her along to a charity and they were able to offer her some met tickets and a small food package. But for the long process where her case went through being determined whether she was a refugee, she had no right to work and was destitute.

She'd been a teacher in her home country and quite an independent lady. But as she was on the poverty line and constantly relying on others, she felt humiliated and became quite isolated and depressed.

Shana's story is very common. There are many people who are in our community with no right to work for many years or months and are trying to support themselves and their families.

[41 : 23] It's estimated that there are 12,000 people in Australia on this bridging visa, which is called a bridging visa E, and has the condition attached of no right to work.

So the people are lawfully in a process, having their visa determined, but are forced to be destitute. And what is frustrating is many of these people have skills in the areas where Australian employers are desperate for workers, but they cannot legally work.

I've seen personally the strain that this brings to people. I've seen the depression, the homelessness, the family breakdown as people are reduced to poverty and the underbelly of our society.

And the fact is it can go on for quite a long time and it just gets worse. I've also seen the people that work at the charities who give of themselves so generously just become so tired and exhausted by having few resources and trying to help more and more.

As I reflect on mandatory detention and on the ban of people from working, I do not think that Jesus would have treated people this way.

[42 : 53] I do not think I would want to be treated this way. The people that I have worked with miss their homes.

They are not necessarily here in Australia by choice. They have left the culture that they know, their lands, their families. Many of them are traumatised.

They have lost loved ones. They've gone through awful experiences that I can't even begin to imagine, how they get up every day and just try and keep going.

But Australia's reaction is to say, you are of no consequence to us, so we won't let you work. We will make you rely on the charity of those around you, even though you're keen and able to work.

I would like to see Australia have a more generous approach to these people and a fairer system of processing people. And if I was going through that system, I would want to be treated in a much better way.

[43 : 59] When looking at the Bible, my reflection is that Jesus calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves, even when that neighbour is not from our religion or our race.

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus breaks through all sorts of boundaries in demonstrating his unconditional love.

He breaks through cultural boundaries, whether it is reaching out to the woman at the well, the leper who is otherwise outcast from the society, or the tax collector in befriending them.

He sees us all as created in the image of God and all deserving of his love. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 was Jesus' response to the question, who is my neighbour?

And it's quite relevant tonight as we look at who is our neighbour. The story Jesus told was that of a foreigner, a Samaritan, who goes to the rescue of a presumably Jewish man who had been robbed, beaten and left for dead as he journeyed from Jericho to Jerusalem.

[45 : 27] A priest and a Levite had seen the man in distress but passed by him. It was not convenient or something that they wanted to do to reach out and help.

But Jesus explains that the foreigner saw this man as his neighbour, had mercy on him and practically showed his love. If our neighbours include people trying to come to Australia, that's going to look like Afghani widows.

It's going to look like Sudanese Christians. Maybe it will look like Chinese dissidents. Maybe it will look like someone from Lebanon. Maybe it's going to be a person of a different skin.

Black people. White people. Yellow people. Educated people. Needy people. Traumatized people. People with skills from the cities like us and people who only know traditional farming as their way of life.

They're going to look very different. They're going to largely be people who can't speak English. And they're not necessarily going to be Christians.

[46 : 46] In Jesus' definition, all these people are our neighbours. So if Jesus calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves, then we need to look at what that might mean for us in approaching asylum seekers.

Whether you agree with the current laws or not is up to you. But I would suggest as a Christian, you cannot ignore the suffering or the result of people in need and respond to those people.

There are many ways you can demonstrate your love and I could talk for a long time about opportunities that people have to demonstrate their love in this area. Very practical ways.

As I've said earlier, you can learn about the issues. You can share your resources. You can open your homes, your lives. You can give of your time.

There are many organisations that I could point you in the direction of, but I'll just give you the details for one tonight. One of them is the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

[48 : 05] And they have a range of activities particularly targeted at people that are living in the community with the no work condition. And they have all sorts of ways for you to volunteer in their programs that range from counselling and healthcare to legal to just making meals each day and providing a friendly plan.

Thank you. This one is the necessary thing. Keep on giving. aprofunders and on Insight jaeus are