September 7, 2017  ***DACA*** Milepost 173

On Tuesday, the Department of Justice announced that it would be ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which is a program that creates a legal pathway for undocumented people who grew up in the United States to get an education, find work, and contribute to society without facing the immediate threat of deportation. This action threw fuel over the already fiery debate on immigration, for nearly everyone – including President Trump – recognizes that the immigrants who were brought to the United States as children were put in a very difficult situation, but there is broad disagreement about how we who are citizens of the United States ought to respond to that situation. Many of those who supported DACA appealed to compassion, arguing that we ought to give the young people who grew up here an opportunity to make an honest living out of empathy toward their situation. Those who opposed DACA reply that compassion is only a secondary concern for the United States government. They believe that the government’s responsibility is to protect the interests of US citizens. Although we may choose to help other people, we are under no legal or moral obligation to do so.

One philosopher described this way of thinking as “the Harm Principle.” He argued that governments have a moral responsibility to keep people from hurting each other, but they don’t actually have a responsibility to help anyone. Many people make this their personal moral code as well. You mind your business, and I’ll mind mine. I have a right to do whatever I want so long as it doesn’t infringe on you, and vice versa. Christians can even fall into this line of thinking when we define morality primarily in terms of *sins* that you commit against others, i.e. sins of commission. Lying, stealing, adultery, slander – these are all sins of commission.

But the moral vision of the Bible goes far beyond the Harm Principle. For example, James 4:17 says, “Anyone, then, who

knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.” Here, James informs us that sins of *omission* are just as significant as sins of *commission*. If we hoard our money rather than sharing it, if we neglect the people whom we are called to love, or if we “bury our talents” – the gifts and passions that God has given each of us for the good of the world – these are all sins of commission, which are just as significant as lying, stealing, and slander.

And one of the most important consistent positive commands that the Bible gives us is the command to offer hospitality to foreigners and strangers. This is not just something “extra” that God encourages us to do if we have met all of our own needs first – it is an essential aspect of being mature and complete disciples of Jesus. On the basis of this, we should lend our voices to the chorus of those who are calling for our country to show respect and hospitality to immigrants.

-Brian Bither