

This weekend, North Side baseball fans are being greeted by demonstrators at Wrigley Field protesting something they consider somehow even more egregious than the Cubs' bullpen and baserunning.

Arizona is in town, and the team's home state is in the news following the governor's signature of a new, hard-line immigration law requiring Arizona law enforcement officials *to question people about their immigration status if there's reason to suspect they are in the country illegally*, writes Paul Davenport of the Associated Press.

This new law has set off a firestorm, including protests nationwide, lawsuits, a follow up law, and widespread debate about immigration reform, racial profiling, legal rights and the contours of justice.

I'm sure we could replicate the national debate ourselves here, blessed as we are in this faith community to include a wide spectrum of political views--there is more liberal-conservative balance here than you might think.

Those who would favor cracking down on illegal immigration have my sympathy.

Arizona is a porous entryway for contraband, and as illegal immigration rates rise, so do violence and, with it, the human and monetary costs of law enforcement.

It's like church--the more people you attract, the more problems you have.

That's the partial truth we don't like to say out loud or print on the brochures, of course, the politically and pastorally incorrect thing to say because God loves and welcomes everyone, which is true, but deep down do we really want God's endless headaches?

Do we really want people in our community who threaten us: non-Christians, illegal immigrants, disagreeable or demanding jerks, the mentally ill and unstable, gun-toting drug smugglers, pedophiles, perverts, Canucks fans, and people who don't dress properly--the people, whoever they may be, who are so different than we think we are that they threaten whatever it is we cherish?

The governor of Arizona, like the Great Shepherd of the sheep, has a community to protect from wolves and thieves who intend harm, and her sheepfold is far too big to build a fence, which it's too late to do anyway.

Surely God understands that.

It was God, after all, who instituted laws for the fledgling, vulnerable chosen community of Israel prohibiting them from eating certain unclean animals.

These animals were public health threats, so God declared them off limits, non-kosher, unclean.

They were also popular among the Gentiles, those outside of the faith community whose ideas and lifestyles were also health threats to the values and faith of God's people.

If such foreigners wanted to come in, if they wanted to join the sacred community of the chosen, they would have to go through a lot more hassle than our legal immigration process to prove they were supporters rather than threats to a holy and cherished way of life.

That's why faithful conservatives like Peter honored the food rules, always with an eye on the overall good of the community.

And that's why I have such sympathy for Peter when he sees his vision and hears a voice from heaven telling him to do precisely what he knows heaven has forbidden him to do.

What is so stunning about this season of Easter is not that we have a *new commandment*, which is really just an old law with Jesus' new twist *as I have loved you*, but that so many other laws are being broken, not by us, but by the God who wrote them.

There was a cosmic law that people who die stay dead.

God broke that.

And now God is breaking food laws and religious laws too.

God is telling Peter to eat unclean food with unclean people.

God pushes Peter not to erect a fence but to dismantle one.

And God has to tell Peter three times, not only because it's Peter and you always have to tell him things three times, but because it is so fundamentally dangerous to the safety and wellbeing of community as Peter knows it that as a responsible leader he pushes back and demands to see God's papers.

Good for him.

Before it's all over, God uses three visions, three visitors, six brothers and one Holy Spirit to get Peter to stop profiling and start welcoming.

And you thought immigration reform was tough.

Yet it is not only Peter's vision that should train our own eyes in how to look at immigration and the other issues of the day...but Peter's Lord.

The one who *said love one another as I have loved you* was a criminal executed by the state.

He was a refugee, a citizen of heaven smuggled to earth, an innocent man far from home trying to make a better life for his family, whom he would define as all of humanity.

He was arrested and mistreated and abused and murdered.

The Great Shepherd of the sheep leads as a slaughtered Lamb.

Maybe God is so concerned about the vulnerable and the victimized because of personal experience, because that's the side of the fence God is on.

One of God's famous followers, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, wrote poignantly this week about the situation in Arizona.

*I recognize that Arizona has become a widening entry point for illegal immigration from the South.*

*The wave has brought with it rising violence and drug smuggling.*

*But a solution that degrades innocent people ... is not a solution.*

*A solution that fails to distinguish between a young child coming over the border in search of his mother and a drug smuggler is not a solution.*

*I am not speaking from an ivory tower.*

*I lived in the South Africa that has now thankfully faded into history, where a black man or woman could be grabbed off the street and thrown in jail for not having his or her documents on their person.*

*How far can this go?*

*We lived it -- police waking a man up in the middle of the night and hauling him off to jail for not having his documents on his person while he slept.*

*The fact that they were in his nightstand near the bed was not good enough...*

*Arizona is a long way from apartheid South Africa.*

*Abominations such as Apartheid do not start with an entire population suddenly becoming inhumane. They start here.*

*We can only hope that this law will be thrown out of the courts in short order...*

*In the meantime, it has opened the door to some smart State leaders sitting down with the leaders of the Latino communities in Arizona and hammering out some solutions that actually work.*

Like Peter, a good solution in Arizona will not come quickly or easily.

Sin lives on every side of every fence we build, and political debate rages eternal because there are saints and sinners in every segment of the system and on every side of the issue, good cops and bad cops, good and bad criminals, good and bad legislators and laws.

The commandment to *love one another* is long on virtue and short on specifics.

But look into the eyes of the one who speaks it.

As a child, he was a refugee in a foreign country in a family on the run for its life.

As a washer of feet, he would have been profiled as a slave, maybe part of a human trafficking ring.

As a criminal on a cross, he was convicted as an enemy of a state and a threat to the peace.

Yet in the Easter surprise of God, it is at *his* table that we all sit down together to keep hammering out love that actually works.