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Dear friends,

What do priests, immigrants,
and top shelf liquor have to
do with each other?

That sounds like the start to a
bad joke. But it's not. It's the
start to instructions on the Old
Testament tithe.

In Deuteronomy 14, the Law
reads that a worshipper was
to set aside ten percent of his
or her income with very
specific instructions. Each
year the money was to be
brought to the place of God's
choosing and spent on... a
party.



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“Spend the money for whatever you desire – oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, and whatever your appetite craves” (Dt 14:26). The worshipper chose the menu but God chose the guest list. It would include priests, orphans, widows, and immigrants. It would be a lavish party in the presence of God populated with the least of these.

This past Thursday, our church greeted a family of seven at the airport. They are from the Democratic Republic of Congo. But the parents were displaced by violence long ago. They spent the last twenty years in a refugee camp in Tanzania. Twenty years. In a tent. All five kids were born in a camp in a foreign country.

Now they are displaced again, but this time to a new home in a new foreign country. They do not speak a word of English. They’ve never seen an escalator or an oven or a thermostat or had their very own light

switch. They brought four lean bags of all their earthly possessions. The flight attendant from their last leg saw us standing together awkwardly in the airport and pulled me aside. She said, "I think they are really hungry. I gave them all the peanuts and pretzels we had."

Our group piled into a caravan, climbing over each other to buckle seat belts, and drove to an apartment complex in our city. Our church had worked feverishly to furnish the place, stock the cabinets, and have a hot meal ready.

While we spread out with puzzles and coloring books for the kids on the floor, our translator, who could match their broken Swahili, marched them through the apartment. Everything was a novelty. The fire alarm got a lot of attention. Everyone took a turn cranking up the oven.

The days ahead are filled with rides to English classes and job training and school enrollment and the social

security office and doctor check-ups. Misembo, the father, is expected to be working and supporting his family in a staggering three to six months.

But for now, in the blurry, jet-lagged stillness of a new, strange home, we learn from English to Swahili to their mother tongue and all the way back through that chain that we are both Christians. Misembo asks if we will pray for his family. We join hands and we do. And we begin to realize just how much we have to learn from these new friends.

This is not the upbeat update about how an act of kindness undoes decades of trauma. This is not a pledge to right the wrongs of sub-Saharan Africa. We haven't saved the day.

This is one small step to be a neighbor. Life in the God of Deuteronomy and the Jesus of Matthew, looks like a million different ways to move toward pain, be generous with possessions, and befriend the unlikeliest of

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people.

David Gentino

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