

# Welcome without Prejudice

Matthew 25:31-46

*‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you*

*welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that*

*are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”*

**"There is no reasoning that justifies over six years of incarceration of innocent people – an imprisonment that continues to this day."**

*‘The boats are coming’ is one of the greatest lies told to the Australian people...*

**Behrouz Boochani**, *The Guardian*, 2 July 2019 (extracts)

If we pay attention to the discourse and propaganda techniques of consecutive governments over these years we notice that essentially the same language and rhetoric has been maintained without the slightest change. Every government has imposed the same logic on society: the policies have been designed and implemented to “stop the boats”. As a result of this simplistic reasoning they have justified an inhumane political program.

The greatest error that many have committed is accepting the government’s reasoning which is based on the simple formula: “We have incarcerated these people on Manus and **Nauru** to ‘stop the

boats”’. If one analyses the different dimensions of this particular exile policy it becomes obvious that the government is lying.

The policy of exiling refugees to offshore prisons is in no way a deterrent. Even if we just entertained the idea that the policy of exile really worked then it would have been relevant to roughly the first six months to a year of its implementation. There is no reasoning that justifies over six years of incarceration of innocent people – an imprisonment that continues to this day.

The reality is that no one is observing the situation in Manus and Nauru, no one considers our fate, no one is waiting to see when we are freed, no one is looking to see where we will be settled.

Many Australians liken the policy of exiling people to Manus and Nauru

to a brick constituting a structure constructed by the government. According to this view, if one brick is removed from this building the whole edifice will suddenly collapse. I argue that this view is completely wrong. Over six years the Australian government has transferred about 1,000 people from these two islands to Australia. In contrast to the government logic, not one boat has come into Australian waters. In addition to this, since 2013 the government has transferred to Australia hundreds of refugees who had been incarcerated on Christmas Island. These refugees were always told they would never make it to Australia and would be eventually exiled to Manus and Nauru. Again, no boats made it into Australian waters. According to official statistics the government sent more than another 700 to the US. Again, no boats came in. The group of refugees in Manus has reduced from 900

individuals in 2016 to 450. In Nauru the numbers reduced from 1,200 to 250 in the same period. One conclusion can be reasonably arrived at. Obviously, the government's intention has never been to close these prisons. Dutton says he would like to free everyone overnight if he could but cannot because the boats would start coming again. This is an outright lie. The question remains, however, if this policy has no relationship with boats arriving in Australia then why does the government insist on keeping people imprisoned on these islands over these years?

The existence of these two-island prisons has always been a justification for the political profit-making of the Liberal party. By making these sites the highlight of their campaign they were sending a message to voters that they were prioritising national security. They were creating the impression that they were strong and the Labor party weak. For years the Labor party

sought to resist the political attack by adamantly supporting the same political project, especially before the last election. For years the two parties have been in competition over who could better sustain the cruel and inhumane policy.

A second pillar of this political project is the economic gain involving these two island prisons. There has been a lack of transparency on how the Manus and Nauru contracts are run. Exact figures are difficult to establish but more than \$9bn has been spent on this state-sanctioned hostage taking and boat turnbacks. What is clear is this: There are strong lobbies that see it in their best commercial interests to maintain this political strategy. Financial profit is one of the main pillars of this political program.

But the third fundamental pillar pertains to individual gain. Without a doubt, this political strategy has ideological foundations based on racism.

If the government had intended to gradually remove one person from this island every three days then all the refugees would be freed by now. By accepting the New Zealand offer to take 150 people a year the government would have ended this situation. Right now they could use the medevac law to evacuate all the sick refugees from the island over a period of two to three months. Over these years the government could have easily emptied these prison camps, but the reality is that they earn political profit for their parties; there are people who benefit financially; and there are also the individual ideological gains. For these reasons they have never intended on solving this issue. "The boats are coming" is one of the greatest lies told to the Australian people in decades. History will reveal all.

## Behrouz Boochani: Untitled (Manus Island poem)

*Forgive me, my bird, as I am not able to embrace you.*

*But here,*

*in this corner,*

*I know some immigrant birds. I smile at them at the crack of dawn*

*and I embrace them with open arms, as open as the immensity of the sky.*

*My beautiful love!*

*Forgive me, as I am not able to quaff the aromatic scent of your breaths,*

*but here, in this ruin,*

*I know some wildflowers which grow every morning in my heart,*

*and at the dead of the night, they drift into sleep with me, in my place.*

*Forgive me, my angel!*

*I am not able to caress your gentle skin with my fingertips.*

*But I have a lifelong friendship with sea zephyrs*

*and those zephyrs strum my nude skin here, in this green hell!*

*Forgive me, as I am not able to climb the green mountains of your body, but here, at a depth of the darkness, in the middle of every night, I enjoy deep and utter seclusion with the tallest and more vain coconut trees.*

*My beautiful! I sing you in the profundities of the oldest and the oddest songs,*

*further away from the world of a man who loves you amongst the deepest oceans and the darkest forests.*

*Inside a cage,*

*the man loves you,*

*inside the cage located between the vastest ocean and the greenest forests.*

*Forgive me, my love.*

*Forgive me, my love, as I am only able to love you from a remote island,*

*inside the cage,*

*from the corner of this small room.*

*Forgive me, please, as the only portion of the world that belongs to me is these pieces.*