

Refugee Week Service 2020

Introduction

During this week we think and pray about refugees and migrants who have had to leave their homes, livelihoods and countries. An unprecedented **70.8 million** people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly **25.9 million refugees**, over half of whom are children **under the age of 18**.* These are not just numbers, they are people, made in God's image, like you and me. They are our neighbours.

Call to worship

In recent weeks the sign of the rainbow has been widely used to signify hope and encouragement during the Coronavirus pandemic. Our Call to Worship comes from Genesis 9.13 – 15a.

'I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind.'

HYMN : STF 24 Come now is the time to worship; STF 628 Faithful One so unchanging

Prayers of praise

Lord you sent the rainbow after the great flood to show Noah and your people that you will never forget them; you will always love and care for each one of us, and for that we praise you.

Against black storm clouds the rainbow is a shining arc of hope and encouragement, a beautiful sign of your faithful presence among us. For the beautiful hope you gift to us, we praise you Lord.

Creator God, in our troubles we look to you, our rock and our refuge,

For we know that you have especial care for the poor and dispossessed.

You fed the hungry and provided shelter for those without a home;

You helped widows and children when they were neglected and marginalised.

For your compassionate and generous love we offer you all our thanks and praise.

In Jesus' name we pray

Amen.

Reading : Genesis 9. 8 – 17 God's Covenant with Noah

In 2016 at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei exhibited 22 orange rescue dinghies on the Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze. The idea came from the artist's involvement with the issue of migration and refugees, particularly those risking their lives to cross the sea in overcrowded and unsafe boats. Our consciences are challenged to confront the tragedy of those who set out on gruelling journeys towards Europe, fleeing destruction and wars. If refugees survived the rough seas and dangerous passage, did they meet with a welcome on the beaches and rocky shores? Was there a rainbow of hope and peace to greet them?



HYMN STF 256 When I needed a neighbour were you there

Prayer of confession

Loving Jesus

As a child, and in fear of your life, you were forced to seek refuge in Egypt.

You know what it is like to be rejected, and to be an outsider.

You call us to love our neighbours as ourselves

But we have hardened our hearts against strangers.

Forgive us and help us change.

You told us not to judge, yet we listen to rumours and fail to check facts.

We hear what is best for us and not what is good for those in need.

Forgive us and help us change.

You said we must welcome everyone, those speaking different languages,
and with different beliefs and cultures,

But we have turned our backs on opportunities to widen our experience

And we have shut out foreigners from our communities.

Forgive us and help us change.

When we struggle to follow your teaching

Help us and forgive us.

In Jesus' name

Amen.

(Pause)

God forgives all who repent of all that separates them from Christ.

His grace and mercy is freely given to all who turn back to Jesus.

Amen.

Reading : Luke 10. 30 – 37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

“And who is my neighbour?”

“And who is my neighbour?” asked the teacher of the law. (v29). In response to this question, Jesus tells the story of the traveller, robbed and beaten on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. The man was left injured and bleeding on the side of the road. Who stopped to help him? Not the priest, or the Levite, passers-by who might have been expected to assist someone in need, but a Samaritan. He was the last person a Jew would have thought might help him. Jews and Samaritans harboured a deeply held hatred of each other.

Yet the Samaritan picked up the injured Jew, bathed his wounds, took him to a place of shelter and organised his care.

After he had told this parable, Jesus asked the teacher of the law which of the three was a neighbour to the assaulted man? The teacher answered correctly but could not bring himself to say the hated name “The Samaritan”, instead saying “the one who had mercy on him”. (v37)

“Who is my neighbour?” is a question we need to ask ourselves when confronted by the increasing numbers of migrants and refugees, people so threatened by war, hunger, persecution or discrimination that they have no choice but to leave their homes, livelihoods and countries behind and seek refuge in another country.

Our neighbours are global; it is a small world, brought together by technology that allows us to see and hear situations and people in faraway places. So refugees from Syria are just as much our neighbours as the family who live next door. The Rohingyas forced out of their villages in Myanmar and living in cramped and unhygienic conditions in Cox’s Bazaar are just as much our concern as the homeless man in a sleeping bag on our street.

Refugees run great risks and suffer enormous hardship to reach what is sometimes a fragile safety. They are on a journey to the rainbow’s end with hope in their hearts for a better future. Here are the stories of two such resilient refugees whom I met on a refugee training course for electricians** in Marka, in 2017.

Mohammed Shada Ayash is a 52 year old from Da’ra in Syria. He had been in Jordan four and a half years, forced to seek refuge in Jordan by the war and threat of terrorism. He was a car mechanic who owned his own garage in Da’ra so in the beginning it was difficult as a refugee, to have nothing. Mohammed suffers from cancer and is unable to do the heavy manual work which is the only (illegal) work available. So he took the chance to retrain as an electrician and hopes to find employment to enable him to support his family. His dream is to return to Syria one day when the war is over.

Mohammed Nazal is also from Da’ra. He is 16 years old. His father was killed in Syria. As the oldest child of the family he is the breadwinner for his five younger siblings and his mother who is unwell. He has some (illegal) work at a gas station. Most of his earnings goes on rent. His dream is to leave the Middle East and go to the USA.



Mohammed Shada Ayash and Mohammed Nazal

During the Coronavirus epidemic, refugees in Jordan have been caring for each other. In Za'atari Camp, Jordan home to 80,000 refugees, they are trying to ensure social distancing by marking out spots on the ground outside the camp supermarket and by making and distributing soap to ensure hygiene. (pic.twitter.com/vxrtWrJHwg (UNHCR @refugees March 29 2020)). In Azraq Camp, Jordan, a drawing by Zeinab a 12 year old Syrian refugee, shows how the Taekwondo enthusiast plans on fighting the Covid 19 virus. pic.twitter.com/Gtlaswr8W5 (UNHCR Ireland @UNHCRireland 7 April 2020)

Our neighbours are next door, on the street, across the sea and worldwide. Jesus calls us to love them all, as we love ourselves.

HYMN : STF 693 Beauty for brokenness

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Compassionate God,

We look to you to give hope and refuge to those who have been forced to leave their homes.

Help us to acknowledge the desperate danger they have been in, their fear and their pain; their uncertainty about what the future holds and their sorrow for families, friends and lives left behind.

Lord, hear our prayers for a genuine welcome for those risking their lives to cross rough seas in small boats, for a better understanding of the situations of war, famine and persecution from which refugees have fled, for a more constructive approach by nations and governments to resettlement and above all, for more sensitivity and sympathy towards those in need.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord, send your Holy Spirit to soften the hard hearts of those who use war to gain power, that they might turn away from violence and instead seek reconciliation, negotiation and peace.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Powerful God, creator of all, we pray for a fairer sharing of resources across the world so that no one is hungry, or thirsty or without a home. Where there are barriers to equality of choice in education, or opportunity to work, lift restrictions so that everyone might gain the dignity of independence.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Lord you protected your son Jesus, Mary and Joseph in exile. We pray for protection for all migrants and refugees, for provision of food and shelter and for generosity from host communities.

Above all Lord, help us to see beyond statistics to the courageous individuals who are refugees, all with stories of tragedy to tell yet who are still determined to chase the rainbow of hope and life.

Help us to change so that refugees are not seen as problems but as valued people with rich experiences to contribute and treasure as our neighbours, to be loved as we love ourselves.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

HYMN STF 716 There are no strangers to God's love

Blessing

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.

The blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit,

Be with you and those whom you love

This day and forever more.

Amen.

* UNHCR April 2020

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Original material/photos Reverend Claire Hargreaves

Opening prayers adapted from resources by CCJ

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