

20th June 2021 – Morning Service

World Refugee Day

Rev Alan Combes

Resources drawn from the Church World Service Organisation & the Methodist Church

Call to Worship

We give praise to our God who gathers us as one people.

We delight in our God who has mercy upon us.

We seek to be one with refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants.

Clear our eyes that we may see the sufferings of displaced people.

We welcome those whose lives have been dislocated by war, famine and injustice.

Open our ears that we may hear the cries of those deep in despair.

We express our solidarity with all who search for a new life, a new home, a new promise.

Guide our feet that we may spread comfort; loosen our tongues that we might speak words of hope.

Give us open hearts that we may be truly welcoming to the stranger in our midst.

God remind us that through our acts of hospitality we are restored to you. Amen.

Song – As we are gathered

As we are gathered

Jesus is here;

One with each other,

Jesus is here;

Joined by the Spirit,

Washed in the blood,

Part of the body,

The church of God.

John Daniels © 1979 Word's Spirit of Praise Music

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Gathering prayer

Holy and merciful God, you have created us all in your image. We exist because of the radical welcome that You granted each one of us at birth. You have created us as refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. You have called us to be your hands and feet in the world, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and set the captives free. God, hear our prayer for peace, for justice, for community. Hear our prayer for your will on earth to be as it is in heaven. God, be with us now, empower us, guide us and sustain us in your name.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession for World Refugee Day by Emily Parsons Dickau

Let us come before the throne of God who has created each person in God's image, and confess together that as a country and a first world community - **We have turned away the needy from our doors.**

We live in a country of plenty, while others live in countries of want. We have promoted economic policies that are destructive to other peoples and nations and do not reflect the love of Christ. Our taxes have often supported violence in other countries that has driven people from their homes and lands.

Lord forgive us. **Lord forgive us.** (Perdonanos oh Dios.)

Let us also confess before Christ, who was himself a migrant and without a home, that as a community;

We have felt more comfortable amongst established groups of friends, and hesitant to welcome newcomers.

We can be slow to confront the racism that we see around us. We sometimes choose ignorance of what is happening in the world over knowledge, because it may demand too much of us.

Lord forgive us. **Lord forgive us.** (Perdonanos oh Dios.)

Let us finally confess before the Holy Spirit who hears the cries of the poor that as individuals;

We are often the beneficiaries of discriminatory policies. We are reluctant to create space in our busy lives for people we know to be different from ourselves.

We sometimes see ourselves as superior to people from other cultures. We find it too easy to forget the millions of people forced to flee starvation and economic devastation. In the midst of rising food prices around the world we continue to throw away food.

Lord forgive us. **Lord forgive us.** (Oh Seignur, que tu nous pardonnes)

O Lord, open our eyes that we may see the needs of refugees; open our ears that we may hear people's cries for justice; open our hearts that we may assist sojourners near and far. Amen

StF 611 – Brother, sister let me serve you

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| 1) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too. | 4) I will weep when you are weeping,
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through. |
| 2) We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load. | 5) When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony. |
| 3) I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear. | 6) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too. |

Richard A M Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song

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Reading: Luke 7:36-8:3

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.' Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said.

'Two people owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii,[a] and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said. Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Reflection - Radical Forgiveness, Radical Welcome

One interpretation of this text picks up on the theme of radical welcome. This unnamed woman, in spite of her social status (what Luke refers to as “sinful”) practices deliberate, far-reaching hospitality. She goes out of her way to anoint Jesus with oil when she learns of his arrival; her tears take the place of water to wash his feet (it was customary to wash dust off the feet of guests who travelled a long way on dusty roads). Lacking a towel, she dries his feet with her hair; she then kisses and anoints his feet with oil. These are all things that his Pharisee host and Simon do not do.

Yet what is unique about this passage is not so much the exhibition of the unnamed woman’s hospitality, but rather the cause. The welcome displayed by the woman is the result of something unexpected – God’s radical forgiveness. Jesus explains to Simon that her demonstration of hospitality is the result of being forgiven: “Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.”(7:47) Jesus discerns the forgiveness that she has already experienced. He sees her as one who has been freed from a great deal of moral debt.

Yet, whereas the pardon has been granted by God prior to this encounter, the forgiveness only becomes fully realized during her interaction with Jesus. This radical welcome has a circular effect: because she is forgiven, she extends welcome, and her ability to welcome becomes her salvation. In other words, by his own authority Jesus confirms forgiveness on the woman; this is the eschatological forgiveness of God resulting in human restoration with the divine will.

God’s word in this Gospel text is that forgiveness is the source of our own ability to welcome others. Radical welcome, in this context, is based on having a relationship with God – one that empowers us to be vulnerable, take risks and welcome the other. In the process, we open ourselves up to being transformed, and like the unnamed woman, we are able to “show great love.” (7:47) According to this passage, salvation occurs at the intersection of forgiveness and hospitality, restoring the relationship between divine initiative and human response.

StF 255 – The kingdom of God is justice and joy

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| 1) The kingdom of God
Is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores
What sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
In Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter
The kingdom shall grow. | 3) The kingdom of God
Is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news,
Repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
Brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement
For gain or for loss. |
| 2) The kingdom of God
Is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed,
The sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened
In place of despair. | 4) God's kingdom is come,
The gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun,
In heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom
Shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory
To God all in all! |

Prayers of the people

God, we pray for your children, all over the world, displaced by human disaster. Lord, we hear the cries of the suffering; we see the violence in our midst.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in sub-Saharan Africa – Mali, Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea. We grieve the nearly 16 years of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo – the unrest, the millions displaced. We mourn the murders, disappearances, mass rape and torture. We mourn the millions of refugees forced to live in overcrowded camps and urban slums with no opportunities for work or recreation.

We pray for your children in East Asia, the Near East, South Asia and Latin America. We pray for Burmese refugees forced to flee continued conflict, seeking essential services like healthcare and education. We pray for your children in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Syria. We pray for all those displaced by violence and unrest, for those forced to leave their homes with no hope of return, for those without appropriate documentation or means of economic livelihood.

God, we pray for all your people and for your church. We pray that you might strengthen us and sustain us with your Spirit, your mercy and your grace. Allow us to heed your call to welcome the stranger in our midst. Open our minds that we learn from and be challenged by difference. Open our hearts that we might act in compassionate service towards the other. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 409 – Let us build a house

1) Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

3) Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

*Ch) All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

4) Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:

2) Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

5) Let us a build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

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Closing prayer – A call to action

As people of God who have blessed with the gift of God's radical forgiveness, how can we practise radical welcome? The promise of God's forgiveness has been shown through the incarnation of God's Word made known to us in Christ Jesus. Through God's unconditional forgiveness, we are empowered to bestow the gift of God's grace to our brothers and sisters who have been displaced through persecution and violence. One way to practise this radical welcome is to welcome refugees who arrive in the UK and into our community; through donating our time and resources in service to refugees, either directly or through charities that support and care for refugees, we can extend radical welcome. Through extending this welcome we are restored to the will of God.