

## Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

### Worship at Home: Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June

*Prepared by Ken Richardson*

#### Preparation

My service for today is a little different from normal – it includes an invitation to reflect upon the topic of migration, and the Christian response to what is often a highly politicised issue. There are two Information Boxes within my reflection that you may wish to skip during the service and return to as part of the Suggested Activities for the Coming Week set out at the end. Before we begin, spend a moment in silence to collect your thoughts and prepare yourself to worship God.

#### Call to Worship

Let us worship God, the God who was present in the beginning, is present in the everyday, and will be present at the end times. Amen.

*Our first hymn also forms part of our opening prayers ...*

#### Listen, read or sing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kVHKuldZyw>

Beauty for brokenness,  
hope for despair,  
Lord, in your suffering world  
this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children,  
justice, joy, peace,  
sunrise to sunset,  
your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives,  
cures for their ills,  
work for all people,  
trade for their skills;  
land for the dispossessed,  
rights for the weak,  
voices to plead the cause  
of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor,  
friend of the weak,  
give us compassion we pray:  
melt our cold hearts,  
let tears fall like rain;  
come, change our love  
from a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars,  
havens from fear,  
cities for sanctuary,  
freedoms to share.  
Peace to the killing-fields,  
scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness,  
his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth,  
oceans and streams  
plundered and poisoned -  
our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness,  
carelessness, greed;  
make us content with  
the things that we need.

Lighten our darkness,  
breathe on this flame  
until your justice burns  
brightly again;  
until the nations  
learn of your ways,  
seek your salvation  
and bring you their praise.

Graham Kendrick (b.1950), Reproduced from Singing the Faith  
Electronic Words Edition, number 693

*We continue in prayer ...*

Father God, you created all people in your own image, you know each one of us by name, and have given us endless opportunities to live our lives in relationship with each other.

You sent your son to live amongst us, to teach us the ways of your Kingdom, to die on a cross so that we might inherit eternal life in all its fullness, and to rise in glory and ascend to heaven.

You send us your Holy Spirit, who enables us to better understand you and the world around us, and empowers us to challenge intolerance and injustice, and campaign for change.

Yet Father God, we fail to respond to the love that you extend to us ...

- We are sometimes dismissive of those who we perceive to be different from ourselves;

- We refuse to listen to their stories or share ours with them;
- We often choose to ignore the pleas of those who cry out for justice.

Father, for all these missed opportunities we seek your forgiveness, and pray for wisdom and strength to live more closely in accordance with your will for us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

**Read: Genesis 12 v1-9, Matthew 9 v9-13**

### Reflection

Today's lectionary readings are traditionally associated with the theme of faith; Abraham's faith when, aged 75, he faithfully responded to God's call by uprooting himself and his family and crossing the desert to begin a new life in Canaan, and Matthew's faith in responding to Jesus's call to become a disciple by immediately getting up and following him. The theme of faith is reinforced in a reading from the lectionary that I didn't choose in which Paul, in his letter to the Romans, holds up Abraham as a supreme example of someone who was justified by faith (Rom 4 v13-25) and also in the second part of the Matthew passage (9 v18-26) which records how Jairus and the woman who suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years placed their faith in Jesus. However, what struck me when re-reading these passages for this service was the realisation that Abraham's story is a 'Migration Story', the story of someone who set off to seek a new life for himself and his family in another country, and that in the Matthew reading we have an example of Jesus reaching out to those on the margins of society, the outcast, the other ... and the thought that this seems to provide 'a way in' to exploring a Christian response to the topical subject of migration that has dominated headlines in recent weeks and months, if not years.

### Migration Stories

The Old Testament is full of Migration Stories. In addition to the story of Abraham we have ...

- the story of Joseph, sold by his brothers to international slave traders and trafficked to another country (Genesis 37 v17b-28);
- the migration of Jacob and his other sons and their families to Egypt in response to a severe famine in their own country (Genesis 46 v1-7);

### Definitions

A **refugee**, according to The 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention is: 'A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'

An **asylum-seeker** is someone who has left their country of origin and formally applied for protection in another country. They are awaiting the outcome of their application.

A **migrant** is a person who has moved to another country for any other reason, such as to find work or join family members.

- the escape of the Israelites, many centuries later, from oppression in Egypt (Exodus 12 v31-41) and their subsequent forty-year journey back to Canaan;
- the forced deportation of many Israelites to Babylon following the conquest of their country by King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1 v1-5) and a song telling the story of their experience of exile (Psalm 137 v1-9); and
- the story of Ruth, the story of two migrations, the first when Naomi goes to Edom with her husband during another famine, and the second when she returns to Bethlehem with one daughter-in-law, Ruth, but is separated from the other, Orpah (Ruth 1 v1-19a).

And in the New Testament, shortly after his birth, Jesus' own family are forced to flee to Egypt to escape from King Herod (Matthew 2 v13-15a). All of these stories are reminders that situations that make headlines today are nothing new.

### Responses

Alongside, these biblical stories of migration, there are also many reminders to God's people about how they should respond to the presence of migrants in *their* midst ... best summed up in the words of Leviticus 19 v33-4; '*When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself,*

*for you were foreigners in Egypt.* It is interesting that out of the Israelites own experience as 'foreigners in Egypt' comes the instruction to respect and love those who reside amongst them as foreigners in their own day.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus not only calls Matthew, a tax collector, someone treated by society as an outcast, to be a disciple, but goes to eat at his house with other tax collectors and so-called 'sinners', those on the margins of society, and in so doing he causes quite a stir. The Pharisees, self-proclaimed guardians of righteousness, challenge him for doing so but Jesus's response is to tell them that God's Kingdom is for all people; not just the rich and the

powerful, but also the poor, the lonely and the outcast. Jesus says 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (v13a), teaching that the route to salvation lies not through animal sacrifices in the temple but through the practical expression of the values of God's Kingdom in everyday settings. Later, Jesus teaches that we should 'love our neighbours as ourselves' and tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10 v19b-37) to illustrate that our neighbour extends to those most in need. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25 v31-46) he teaches that it is our response to the needs of the stranger that lies at the heart of God's Kingdom. Similarly, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews urges us to show hospitality to the stranger (Hebrews 13 v2).

### **Migration to the UK**

Figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on May 25<sup>th</sup> show that net migration into the UK in 2022 was 606,000, the difference between the 1,163,000 people who arrived in the UK and the 557,000 who left, an increase of 164,000 on the number for 2021. Considering the figures in more detail reveals that, of the arrivals, 925,000 were from non-EU countries (of which around 175,000 arrived via humanitarian routes\* including 114,000 Ukrainians and 52,000 from Hong Kong, nearly 350,000 arrived on student visas, and the number of work-related arrivals was 235,000).

However, the figure that receives the most attention from Government and the media is the number of people who arrive in the UK after crossing the English Channel in small boats with the figure for 2022 being 45,755. Of these, it is estimated that around 90% claimed asylum, making up nearly 45% of the more than 89,000 asylum applications in 2022. In respect of the backlog in processing these applications, the figure at the end of 2022 was about 166,000, a 60% rise on the number at the end of 2021, with almost 110,000 applicants having waited longer than 6 months for a decision on their case.

*\*These include, amongst others, the **UK Resettlement Scheme** (for vulnerable refugees in refugee camps in neighbouring countries where there is conflict or instabilities), the **Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP)**, the **Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine)**, and the **British National (Overseas) Visa** (for eligible persons living in Hong Kong).*

This year's Refugee Week runs from 19<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> June. It is an arts and culture festival to celebrate the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary in the UK. It isn't a specifically Christian festival but is supported by City of Sanctuary UK, an organisation founded by Inderjit Bhogal, a former President of the Methodist Conference and recipient of the World Methodist Peace Award. This year's theme is compassion and everyone is invited to learn and celebrate what compassion looks like in action.

Migration is a complex subject but let us remember that at the centre of every Migration Story is a personal lived experience to which, as followers of Jesus, we are called to respond with understanding, mercy and compassion. Amen.

### **Suggested Activities for the Coming Week**

In the gospel reading, Jesus invites us all 'to go and learn' what mercy means (v13a). Read and reflect upon one or more of the Migration Stories mentioned above and relate it to Jesus' teaching about responding to those on the margins.

Choose one of the following resources to download, read and reflect upon:

**UK asylum and migration policy**, JPIT, Jan 2023, <https://jpit.uk/issues/asylum-and-migration>

**Sanctuary: The Hospitality of Host, Guest and Stranger**, CTBI, 2022,

<https://churchofsanctuary.org/resources/>

**Material for Refugee Week 2023**,

<https://refugeeweek.org.uk>

**Listen, read, pray or sing:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDAAvWbmmxw>

When I needed a neighbour, were you there,  
were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there,  
were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

I was cold, I was naked, were you there,  
were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

When I needed a shelter, were you there,  
were you there?

When I needed a shelter were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

When I needed a healer, were you there,  
were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,  
wherever you travel, I'll be there.  
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter (1915-2004) Reproduced from Singing the Faith  
Electronic Words Edition, number 256

**Prayer of Intercession**

Father God, we pray for the church throughout the world, that she may extend a warm welcome to all, reach out to those in need, and campaign for peace, justice and change.

We pray for the nations and their leaders, that every citizen will be treated with dignity and respect, and all those who come to live, work or seek sanctuary will be treated with generosity and compassion.

We pray for those who feel they have no other option but to leave their homeland because of famine, war or persecution, and embark on a dangerous journey to another land.

We pray for those who are displaced within their own country, and that they will soon be able to make a safe return to their homes.

We pray for those whom we know personally who are in need of our prayers, those who are sick, the bereaved – we name them in our hearts.

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we may learn to love our neighbours as ourselves more dearly and extend hospitality to the stranger.

Merciful Father, these prayers we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Listen, read, pray or sing:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBxlv7reiw4>

There are no strangers to God's love,  
yet we have privatised God's grace.  
Bounded by nationhood and lies,  
in fear we shrouded love's own face.  
Acknowledging our sin and greed  
we come confessing common need.

These are our neighbours and our friends,  
the ones who run in fear from war,  
who dread abuse by power or state,  
or seek the means to be less poor;  
these are the ones we have denied,  
as in each one the Christ has cried.

When people seeking sanctuary  
come to our shores and need our aid,  
then in Christ's name let's offer care;  
through this our debt of love is paid  
God's grace is free, this grace receive,  
let actions show what we believe.

Andrew Pratt (b.1948), Reproduced from Singing the Faith  
Electronic Words Edition, number 716

**Blessing**

May we respond to Jesus' call to follow him, and his example of reaching out to all who are in need with mercy and compassion. Amen.

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