



20 June 2021

Welcome & Call to Worship

Welcome to worship on this Sunday which is World Refugee Day and the end of Refugee Week in the UK.

The theme of Refugee week 2021 is “We cannot walk alone.” This theme certainly seems very relevant this year, and after the extraordinary year 2020, when life has been tough for so many people and the future feels uncertain. The crisis we are living through has shown how interconnected we are and how much we need each other. But more so, the theme is an invitation to reach out to refugees all over the world, who need us to walk with them on their journey to a new life, in safety, with dignity and respect. In our Scripture reading today we find Jesus’ disciples in a storm, but not alone. Jesus is in the boat with them and calms their fears. How can we calm the fears and be with those who literally or figuratively find themselves on stormy waters while seeking safety and peace? We can reach out to them as we hear their cries and see their suffering, just as God does in Jesus Christ who walks along with us on our journey of life, calming storms and welcoming all people. So let us worship and praise God whose love for all people, made known in Jesus Christ, has brought us together today.

Hymn Let us build a house where love can dwell

Prayer

Loving God, may your presence be known to us today in word and reflection, in prayer and song and in faithful community. May our faith be renewed in this time of worship. May we feel confident that as you have gathered us together, in church or at home, your Spirit dwells in our midst, moving us to a life of love and faithfulness. O God, may we trust your goodness, your loving purposes for our lives and for the world. And may we be witnesses in word and deed of the good news we have received in Jesus Christ, that you will not let evil and despair have the last word. And so, whenever we feel overwhelmed by fear, doubt, worry and pain...when we may even doubt your love and care when storms rage and we are tossed about, may we always be reminded of your comfort, your healing, your empowering Spirit and, above all, your abiding love. Amen

Scripture Reading Mark 4: 35-41

Hymn Eternal Father strong to save

Reflection

At the end of a long and tiring day Jesus and his disciples get into a boat in order to cross the sea of Galilee to the other side. But on the way a storm arises and the waves crash on the sides of the boat and even spill into the boat. It was just a small fishing boat, tossed about on the waves of an unexpected storm. The boat is filling with water, and the disciples are filling too....with fear! With the crashing of each wave they become more afraid. "O Lord, deliver us!" they first murmur and then they cry out loud. The disciples are afraid; this storm is like no other storm and the boat is tossed about and they are afraid that they may perish in the sea. And this image of the disciples in the boat immediately calls to mind images of desperate asylum seekers in dingey boats crossing the Mediterranean sea or the channel and finding themselves in trouble when the sea is rough and their overcrowded boats are filling with water. You can just imagine how frightening that must be.

The disciples are afraid even though Jesus is with them in the boat....sleeping! The one filled with the spirit of God, the one person who might avert a disaster is sleeping peacefully and soundly through the storm. The disciples wake Jesus up; "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Instead of responding to the disciples, Jesus rebukes the wind and tells the stormy seas to die down. "Peace! Be still!" The disciples are amazed. "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" The Gentile Christians who were persecuted in the Roman Empire and for whom Mark wrote his gospel took heart from this story. "It is God who created the world out of chaos, God who stills storms, that is the God we know in Jesus Christ" is the message they would have taken from this story. Also today storms rage all over the world, not only the storm of the pandemic but also of what seem to be never ending conflicts that die down and flare up again, and with waves of human-made and natural disasters crashing on people's lives. And on this day we remember that this is why so many people are forced to flee their homes and their communities, often going on dangerous journeys by land and sea, just to find safety and security for themselves and their families. "Wake up, Jesus! Do you not care?"

But in the midst of the cries, their cries and our cries, we need to pay attention....pay attention to not just the news reports we are bombarded with and that fill us with paralyzing worry and fear. For instance, the continuing reporting of the pandemic is making us fearful; it paralyzes us and it will take time for people to feel safe again! No, we should pay attention to what does *not* fill the news headlines....all the acts of kindness, compassion, of bravery, of generosity, of hospitality that happen all the time, all over the world, far from the limelight. For all the storms that are raging, there are also many places where life is calm and peaceful. Just as infection rates may be rising in some places in the UK, in other places the cases are very low. Let us just not forget!

But yes, there are storms, some raging far away and some closer home and sometimes in our own lives. Yet, we are not alone. Again and again we realize that countless people are providing relief and care and are looking out for and advocating for those who are tossed about by the storms of life. However much the winds are howling and the clouds are menacing, they make sure that those who are afraid are not journeying alone through the storm. And what do we do? Are we there when our neighbour in need of whatever creed, colour or name, calls on us for food, for shelter, for healing? Yet also, while in the storm or facing storms, let us trust the one who is in the boat with us and to whose powerful and saving words we can hold fast: "Peace! Be still!" Come what may, Jesus is with us, we are not alone. Jesus is with us, reminding us that God is in the business of calming storms or seeing us through them. So let us not be afraid; let us be confident in faith and persistent in faithfulness. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn

When I needed a neighbour

Prayers & Lord's Prayer *Prayer for Refugee Sunday*

God of family, we bring before you the parents who are weeping and lamenting, who are waiting for their children, whose trace is lost in the sea, in the desert, on railway tracks, in shipping containers and uncertainty:

men, women and children who had escaped from the war zones, the famine and poverty of this world, with the hope for a better, safer life.

God of life, we bring before You our lament for the dead, stranded at the borders of safety, who died fleeing through deserts, over mountains and seas. We call to You and join in the cry of all those who sought

justice

and a better life for themselves and their children and perished in the process. God of justice, we bring before You political leaders, advisers and decision-makers who hold the fate of others in their hands. Make them aware of the causes of migration and flight. Keep their consciences alive so that refugees are offered protection and dignity. Let them agree rules of residence that are based on human rights and guided by solidarity and compassion. God of peace, give us the strength to be witnesses of the suffering of the world and fill us with the fire of Your spirit to renew our efforts to serve those in need and give us the grace to welcome, learn about and share our lives with people who come to live in our communities. (*Sanctuary Sunday Writers Group /Church of Scotland*)

We pray for those we know who are struggling in troubled waters with the wind and waves battering them. We pray for all who are overwhelmed by the storms of life be it because of ill health of body or mind, poverty, injustice, prejudice, lack of shelter or safety.....(Silence) We pray, compassionate God, that your presence may be known by those who are suffering, that you may calm the troubled waters, and that we may hold them in our hearts and bear your light to them. We pray as Jesus taught us.....OUR FATHER

Offering

May the blessings of God bring our gifts to life, to calm storm and to bring hope and healing in the world. Amen.

Hymn

I the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing

Go boldly into a new week.....

God will be there as God is with us now

Christ our companion will walk beside us

And the Spirit who makes all things new will guide us on the way.

Amen.