

Refugee Sunday preaching notes

Based on Revised Common Lectionary readings 20.06.21

Readings

1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49 and

Psalm 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Sometimes, when we look at news items about people who have had to flee their homes because of wars or persecution, the situation may feel overwhelming. We may think: “What can I do, small and insignificant as I am?”

But the story of David and Goliath teaches us that the most humble and unlikely individual can overcome a giant, in the LORD's strength. David declares to Goliath “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts” (v.45). We can ask God to help us work with others to confront and overcome injustice and to meet people’s needs.

Our film series ‘Together in Welcome’ shows ordinary people across the Thames Valley who, as Christians, are campaigning for political change, working towards a more welcoming and compassionate society, challenging attitudes that are hostile to migrants, and offering homes to families that have lost their own.

Could you and your church community ask God for courage and strength to step out and do something new? It could be something as simple as engaging with a local refugee support project, or befriending someone in your community who has been through a refugee journey. Or it could be something larger. Pray for discernment – secure in the knowledge that what God calls God’s people to do, God also equips them to do.

Psalm 9:9-20

As Christians we are called to see and treat others as God does. Psalm 9, like many other places in the Bible, declares that “The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (v.1). God cares about injustice, persecution and suffering, “he does not forget the cry of the afflicted” (v.12). We should not either.

We can prayerfully consider what we can do to help alleviate the suffering of refugees and to offer welcome. We can act and we can pray. We can use the words of this Psalm to cry out to God on behalf of refugees who have suffered, saying “Rise up, O LORD! Do not let mortals prevail; let the nations be judged before you” (v.19).

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Paul describes some of the ways he had to suffer for the gospel (v. 4-5).

Many Christians around the world today are also persecuted for their faith and have to endure beatings, imprisonment and other hardships. Some are forced to flee from their country for their own safety and the safety of their families. They become refugees. Their journeys to find refuge, like Paul's journeys, are often marked by afflictions, hardships and calamities and require great endurance (v.4). Long distances on foot, perilous sea crossings in small boats, dangerous rides in lorries, sleeping overnight in the open, or in crowded unsanitary camps can all be part of their experience.

When a few finally arrive at our shores they are sadly often met by hostile border security, immigration officials working within a culture of disbelief, and anti-immigrant political rhetoric. These refugees can surely identify with Paul's words "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true" (v.8). Of course, not all who seek refuge in the UK are persecuted Christians. There are many other reasons why people may need to leave their homes behind and migrate. Some are fleeing persecution on other grounds, such as sexual orientation, race or political affiliation, and some are escaping conflict. We should not forget that the UK receives only a tiny proportion of the world's refugees – the vast majority are hosted by neighbouring countries. But some do come to the UK and claim asylum, as is their right under international law. May we open our hearts wide (v.13) to them, showing them dignity and respect as individuals, made in the image of God.

Mark 4:35-41

We can be certain that God cares and wants to help us. As the disciples faced the storm on the lake they woke Jesus up saying "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (v. 38). Of course he cared about them – and he not only cared, but had the power and authority to do something! "He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm" (v.39).

Refugees and those who stand alongside them can encounter many storms – from literal storms during a dangerous passage to the waves of hostility and negativity that threaten to overwhelm people emotionally.

However bad things may look, though, if we know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we have access to His power. He can work through us and overcome obstacles for us, enabling us to do amazing things and to fulfil our calling to love our neighbour.