Call to Worship

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

**PEOPLE:** We delight in our God who is merciful and compassionate.

**LEADER:** We confess that we are blinded by our own privilege, but today we honor and pray for the refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants.

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

**LEADER:** Let us work together to welcome those whose lives have been dislocated by war, famine and injustice.

**PEOPLE:** Open our hearts to those who are too often placed on the margins of our society.

**LEADER:** Let us walk in solidarity with all who search for a new life, a new home, a new promise.

**PEOPLE:** Guide our path and give us courage to cross borders and boundaries designed to separate.

**LEADER:** Strengthen our faith and lead us to action to bring God’s realm of justice, dignity and equality for all.

**ALL:** Remind us that through our acts of hospitality we also welcome the love of God in our lives. *Amen*

Gathering Prayer

God of liberation and love; You have created us all in your image; You have given us Your vision of love, peace and dignity for all; Yet so many have suffered unjust persecution, extreme poverty and violence; Today we remember and pray for the 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 and for liberation; hear our prayer for the coming of the realm of God; be with us now, empower us, guide us and sustain us in this work to welcome our neighbor. *Amen.*

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name. Isaiah 65:1
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 and the Democratic Republic of Congo; we grieve the unrest, the millions displaced; we mourn the murders, disappearances, 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 all those displaced by violence and unrest...

We pray for your children in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan. 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, may we accept them as our equals.

We pray for all struggling to seek a better life in Europe after years of war and violence. We lift up one of the largest displacements of people in Syria, and pray our decision makers find a way to resettle them here in the U.S.

God, we pray for all your people and for your church; we pray that your Spirit, your mercy and your grace; give us strength to heed your call to welcome the stranger in our midst; to love our neighbor and to act for justice with open our hearts and open minds. Amen.
Gospel Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Stills a Storm - Mark 4:35 – 41 (NRSV)

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” 39 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. 40 He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Sermon Seeds

To the other side...

A good part of Jesus’ ministry centers around the shores of the Galilee. Referred to as the ‘Sea of Galilee,’ this body of water is actually a relatively small freshwater lake, about 8 miles wide. In Jesus’ time this small body of water created a large boundary. The lake served to separate the western Jewish side and the eastern Gentile side of Galilee. This was a separation of people that were perceived within the larger Roman world to be significantly different. The Gentile world represented an ‘other’ for the Jews.

Tragically, human history is full of examples of nations, ethnic groups, and people enacting borders as a means of exclusion, oppression, and marginalization. Even today the immigration debate centers around the rhetoric of ‘securing our borders.’ Beyond physical national borders we enact cultural borders. In many parts of the world refugees are forced to leave their homes due to religious, ethnic, or cultural persecution. Boundaries have a painful way of conveying that someone is an "other" and that they don’t belong.

In this story Jesus and his disciples, inspired by spreading the gospel, cross a border. "Let's go over to the other side" Jesus says to his disciples. He was talking about crossing the Sea of Galilee. This is a journey accross a cultural and political boarder; an act of solidarity. It meant crossing into unknown territory and embracing the other.

We are perishing...

As Jesus and his disciples set sail to cross over the Sea of Galilee a huge windstorm arises. Jesus’ disciples are fishermen, and have surely survived storms on this sea before, but this time

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1 For more On this interpretation of the text see: Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice (New York: Orbis books, 2012)
they are terrified. The danger of this storm is beyond moderate, it is life threatening. If a boat heads into a wave that is higher than the boat is long, or wide, it may capsize.

Shockingly, Mark tells us that Jesus is asleep. How could Jesus – the incarnation of Godself - be so calm and passive? Surely this moment cries out for immediate intervention. The disciples interpret Jesus sleeping as evidence that he does not care enough about them to save them. They shout to him: “do you not care that we are perishing?”

People are perishing all around us. Recently the United Nations put out an estimate of 220,000 lost lives in the war in Syria. Deadly violence and conflicts continue today in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Ukraine, Syria, and in many countries in West and Central Africa, forcing people to flee their homes.

For many of the roughly 60 million displaced people around the world, the journey from their homes comes at the cost of unimaginable danger. Hundreds perish every year on the journey from Central America to the United States; refugees drown on their way from Indonesia to Australia, or off the coast of Thailand and in the Bay of Bengal; they die crossing the Sahara Desert into North Africa, the Mediterranean into Europe, or in the Gulf of Aden as they try to reach the Middle East. In the most tragic of these cases, refugees often disappear and die without a trace.

There are certainly times when we wonder if God is awake. Like those early disciples, we fear that the suffering is so great that God has abandoned us.

Why are you afraid? Do you not have faith?

Jesus wakes up and calms the storm immediately. His voice and command reflect his authority over the wind and the water. Jesus' words "Peace! Be still!" are reminiscent of God’s authority in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The first verses in Genesis tell about the wind of God moving over the waters; Exodus recounts the parting of the Red Sea; and there are many similarities between this account of the storm and the Book of Jonah. However, while Jesus is like Jonah, he demonstrates that his power is greater than Jonah – this is an Epiphany of God’s power and presence.

We quickly learn that the fear of the disciples has overpowered their faith. They lose faith that God could be present even during the threat of a devastating storm. It is ironic that the disciples, those that are closest to Jesus, are the ones that fail to see the hand of God at work.

2 To reference these examples and for more on deaths during the journey of migration see: http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FatalJourneys_CountingtheUncounted.pdf
This passage teaches that fear is the most destructive force that exists. Fear has the power to paralyze us; and lead to inaction in the face of injustice. Fear has the power to make us blind to the spirit of God, and the redeeming work of God.

It is faith that allows us to see God at work. Fear is replaced by awe when the work of God reveals itself. We see the work of God when the international community responds to the cries of displaced people by offering immediate assistance, and long term durable solutions. We see the hand of God at work when we the federal government responds to the millions of new Americans that need a path to full citizenship.

We see the hand of God at work when people of faith rise up together. Faith overpowers fear when we respond to the needs of displaced people.

**Response to the Word: Call to Action**

As people of faith who feel called to respond to displaced people worldwide, how can we practice radical welcome?

One way to practice this radical welcome is to join with our partners at Church World Service to
welcome refugees who arrive to the United States and into our community. Through donating our time and resources in service to refugees, we can extend radical welcome. Through extending this welcome we overcome fear and live out our faith.

Get in Touch With Us

Find out more at cwsglobal.org/helprefugees

Who are We?

Church Word Service is a faith-based humanitarian organization that assists refugees across the globe. We have worked with local congregations since our beginnings in 1946 to help ensure that refugees have the best possible start in the United States.

Today we continue to work locally, supporting communities in their efforts to provide for the most vulnerable in our world. We are supported by several communions that sponsor refugees in the United States including the American Baptist Churches USA, the Christian Reformed Church, the Christian Church – Disciples of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church USA.

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