

Call to Worship

Leader: We journey into this special worship remembering your call for Abraham and Sarah to travel to a new land so all families of the earth may be blessed.

People: God, help us bless those who have sacrificed and braved dangers to find safety among us.

Leader: We seek, in this and every season, to strengthen as a faith family in our love for others, remembering your words to "do no wrong to the stranger," and growing to accept one another and ourselves.

People: God, strengthen us to be family for newcomers we encounter, welcoming them and offering security and hope through our community, even as you have welcomed us.

Leader: We gather as one, united from lives that are diverse, and recalling how you asked us to care for the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner.

People: God, encourage us to know that whenever we share hospitality with others, we find in those relationships opportunities to more deeply see your face and do your will.

ALL: Lord of grace and love, call us anew in this time to give witness to your heart of generosity. Surround us fully with your love as we worship, so that the joy of your embrace might grow our confidence to open arms wide to the needs of your world.

Prayers of the People

Oh God, our creator and liberator, we pray for all those who face the trials and tribulations of exclusion. We lift up all those who have been made outcast in our world; for those impoverished by inequality, for those who find themselves in the cold from homelessness, for those who are treated differently because of their skin color or religious background. Today on this welcome weekend, we say a special prayer for all the refugees in the world who have faced violence and persecution. Now many of them face discrimination upon arriving to the safety of this land. Strengthen our faith to be accepting to all and fortify our witness to advocate for just and humane policies that expand the path of welcome for refugees to join our communities. In the same way, we pray for all those who face sickness and disease, in our congregation and throughout our community, may Your blessing comfort them and may Your healing power touch them. In the spirit of love and compassion we pray. Amen.



Prayers for Refugees

Compassionate God, make your loving presence felt to refugees, torn from home, family and everything familiar. Warm, especially, the hearts of the young, the old, and the most vulnerable among them. Help them know that you accompany them as you accompanied Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in their exile to Egypt. Lead refugees to a new home and a new hope, as you led the Holy Family to their new home in Nazareth. Open our hearts to receive them as our sisters and brothers in whose face we see your son, Jesus. Amen.

Father of the poor, God of love, you made us all your children; we praise You and thank You. Fill us with a sense of justice. Help us in your work, to take the side of the lowly, to defend the newcomer, to welcome the stranger. Help us now to be friend the friendless, protect the weak children, and work for the rights of all. Lord, on our journey home, bring us together in peace, in justice, and in love, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Home

by: Warsan Shire

Consider reading selections of Warsan Shire's powerful poem to build understanding of a refugee as someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark you only run for the border

when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you breath bloody in their throats the boy you went to school with who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory is holding a gun bigger than his body you only leave home when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you fire under feet hot blood in your belly it's not something you ever thought of doing until the blade burnt threats into your neck and even then you carried the anthem under your breath only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets sobbing as each mouthful of paper made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a
truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps or strip searches where your body is left aching or prison, because prison is safer than a city of fire and one prison guard in the night is better than a truckload of men who look like your father no one could take it no one could stomach it no one skin would be tough enough...

unless home chased you to the shore unless home told you to quicken your legs leave your clothes behind crawl through the desert wade through the oceans drown save be hunger beg forget pride your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear saying-leave, run away from me now i dont know what i've become but i know that anywhere is safer than here.

www.refugeesarewelcome.org

Intercessions

For the people of Syria For the United Nations, our own nation, and the fellowship of nations For refugees, and those in harm's way

For peacemakers, relief workers, and policy makers

For the voices of peoples of faith, that we may have courage, grace, integrity and the strength to listen and to speak.

Scripture Mark 4:35 – 41 NRSV

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 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?" 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. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 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 to 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 of identity. 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 transgression of 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 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. The United Nations put out an estimate of over a quarter of a millionⁱ lost lives in the war in Syria. Deadly violence and conflicts continues event today in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and in many countries in West and Central Africa, forcing people to flee their homes.

For many of the roughly 59.5 million forcibly displaced people around the world who live outside their country of origin, the journey of migration comes at the cost of unimaginable danger. Hundreds perish every year on the journey from Central America to the United States; migrants drown on their way from Indonesia to Australia, or off the coast of Thailand and in the Bay of Bengal; migrants die crossing the Sahara Desert into North Africa, or drown in the Gulf of Aden as they try to reach the Middle East. In the most tragic of these cases, migrants 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.

This passage teaches that fear is the most destructive force we posses. 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.

ii Figures at a Glance. Retrieved May 23, 2016, from http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html



ⁱ Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved May 23, 2016, from http://www.unocha.org/syria