

ELCG Devotional Activity

3rd Sunday after Pentecost•

Week of 21 June 2020

Scriptures:

“Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God... But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me... Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. (Psalm 69:1-3,13,16)

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

Reflection

Over this past weekend, our congregation joined churches in Geneva and throughout Switzerland in prayer and actions to honor and remember the plight of refugees worldwide. On Saturday – World Refugee Day 2020 – volunteers read the names of refugees who died trying recently to get into Europe. Many of them were known simply as N.N.

Nomen nescio, abbreviated to N.N., is used to signify an anonymous or unnamed person. The term is derived from Latin, meaning literally, “I do not know the name.”

In worship on Sunday, we prayed, remembering those who have died. We remembered their families who are grieving and at times struggling to pay off debts to smugglers. We prayed for those caught in camps, desperately hoping for their chance for freedom. We prayed, as well, for those whose hearts are filled with fear and closed to the plight of the strangers in need in their midst. We prayed for some of the refugees whose names have been lost (N.N.'s), though they are known and loved by God.

This week we continue to reflect upon, pray for, and to take action on behalf of refugees and those who are displaced and vulnerable.

• We are now in “Ordinary Time,” the season of the liturgical year which follows Pentecost and is marked by the color green. The term “ordinary” does not mean mundane or routine, but instead it refers to measured time. During this extended season, our focus turns to spiritual growth and discipleship. We are reminded that the everyday moments of life hold possibilities for us to encounter God’s love and to mature in faith, love, and hope as disciples of the risen Christ.

Every minute twenty people from various countries throughout the world leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror. Who is a refugee? The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as “someone, regardless of age, who is forced to flee their country and seeks protection in another country owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” Many also become refugees due to war, hunger and climate change. According to UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency) at least 70.8 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 23.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under 18 years of age.

Consider how radically your world would change if you were forced to leave your home and possessions without notice, to relocate to an area where you know no one and have little idea of where your next meal will come from. It takes profound courage and determination for the millions of refugees who are forced to embark on the traumatic journey to leave their home in search of a better and safer life.

The worldwide Covid-19 pandemic has only heightened the challenges for refugees who live in very precarious conditions. Many are living in overcrowded and unhygienic situations. Access to water, sanitation, and healthcare facilities are limited. Social distancing and regular handwashing may be almost impossible for many.

In addition to concerns for physical health, many refugees are vulnerable to exploitation. Human trafficking and smuggling of refugees and migrants are crimes with serious human rights implications, which are only further accentuated in times of crisis.

Our faith has plenty to tell us about how we are to treat refugees and other displaced persons, those who are identified in our scriptures as “strangers,” “sojourners,” or “foreigners.” They are to be free from oppression, treated with love and compassion, and welcomed into the community.

We honor the struggle of refugees throughout the world. We celebrate their courage, their strength, their resilience. We give thanks for the contributions they make to the communities in which they land, as they rebuild their lives. And we pray for justice and peace.

Activity Suggestions:

*** Write a letter**

Part of our calling as people of faith is to take action in the face of injustice, to advocate for those who are vulnerable. During our worship time, we were invited to write letters as part of the “Beim Namen nennen” initiative for World Refugee Day. If you have not already done so, take the time to do so now.

Our handwritten letters are being addressed to the Swiss government in support of just and compassionate treatment of refugees. The hope is to gather the number of letters that equal the number of refugees who have died trying to reach Europe since 1993 – over 40,000. A sample letter is included at the end of this devotional – you are free to adapt it to your own words. Letters should be sent by 30 June. They will be collected and delivered together to the Swiss parliament as an expression of solidarity with refugees.

*** Learn Their Stories**

Throughout this week, take the time to hear stories of refugees. A great resource is the website of the UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency:

<https://www.unhcr.org/stories.html>

Each day this week, choose a new story to read. There are many to choose from! Reflect upon the journey of the refugee whose story is highlighted, and pray for the situations involved:

What were circumstances that forced her/him to leave their home country?

What risks did they take in order to reach a place of safety and security?

What struggles have they faced?

In what ways do they contribute to and enhance the community that is their new home?

Consider your own faith journey, including times that have required courage and resiliency.

After reading this refugee's story, how do I relate to their struggle and their resilience?

In my own community, how can I support or advocate for refugees?

A Prayer for Refugees¹

God of Hope,

We worship you as the God of those in exile,
to whom you hold out the hope of finding peace and security.

We pray for those on a journey away from their homes.

For sisters and brothers on the move who are fearful and hungry and tired,

For those in camps, facing the dangers of COVID-19 without a safe place to isolate.

For those separated from loved ones, holding on to the hope of reunion.

For all at risk of exploitation and trafficking.

We pray for those on the journey of seeking asylum in Switzerland, Europe, and throughout the world.

For sisters and brothers struggling to make ends meet with little support.

For those in lockdown, forced to relive the traumas of past experiences.

For those hoping for a better future for themselves, their loved ones, and the country they call home,

For all waiting for good news.

Be with everyone on a journey, God of Hope,

And give us the wisdom and perseverance to keep travelling towards your kingdom of peace for all people.

Amen

¹ Joint Public Issues Team: Churches Working for Peace and Justice, World Refugee Day 2020: Prayer, adapted.

Write a Letter in Solidarity

Letters should be handwritten and mailed to this address by 30 June:

netzwerk migrationscharta.ch
Bürenstrasse 8
3007 Bern

Sample Letter

Your name Place and date

Dear Mrs. President of the Confederation, Federal Councilors,
and Honorable Members of the Parliament,

This World Refugee Day, my church in Geneva is participating in the “Beim Namen nennen” initiative. Along with other churches and organizations throughout Switzerland, we are reading the names of refugees who lost their lives trying to reach Europe. Since 1993, more than 40,000 persons have died in their attempts to find safety and security.

I am writing today to urge your support for policies and practices aimed at welcoming refugees. In your capacity as lawmakers and public servants, I urge you to remember these lives lost and to help guide us in responding with compassion and generosity toward those seeking a better life.

Thank you for your attention and your service.

Sincerely,