

Refugee Week, 17-23 June 2019:

FHN (Fund for Human Need of the Methodist Church) is pleased to offer help with any midweek or Sunday Service you may be leading

Of the lectionary readings suggested for Sunday 23 June, we commend the following:

1Kings 19.1-4: it could be extended to tell Elijah's story and why he fled his country

Psalms 42 and 43 together are a Psalm of Lament, possibly for the Nation, but most likely for an Individual. The psalmist could have been a refugee, maybe during the time of the Babylonian exile. The one fleeing looks for certainty as he(/she), in the time of great turmoil in his(/her) life, longs for the presence of God. 'Put your hope in the Lord', cries the heart.

(Psalm 137, better known perhaps, clearly feeds us with further thoughts on the plight of the one fleeing. Elijah's story (1 Kings 18.16-19.18) could stir us - to empathise with those who flee great terror and a threat to their own lives.)

Gal. 3.23-29 ends where we need to begin: all refugees are equally human beings, and precious to God.

A song on video to play: Boney M's 'The Rivers of Babylon...' (Sopot Festival 1979)

A song to sing: As the deer pants for the water... *Singing the Faith* 544

Hymns to sing from *Singing the Faith*

514 The thirsty deer longs for the streams

635 My troubled soul, why...

705 It is God who holds the nations...

For Prayers and Meditations, visit The London Churches Refugee Fund - Lent Resources 2019, www.help4refugees.co.uk

For information, visit: www.refugeeweek.co.uk

This Refugee Week, we are invited to discover the experiences of displacement that are found in our families, neighbourhoods and history.

The theme of Refugee Week 2019, '**You, me and those who came before**', is an invitation to explore the lives of refugees – and those who have welcomed them – throughout the generations.

People escaping war and persecution have been welcomed by communities in the UK for hundreds of years, and their stories and contributions are all around us. From the Jewish refugees of the 1930s to people fleeing Vietnam in the 1970s, Kosovans in the 1990s to those arriving today; they are part of who we all are.

Seven acts are suggested:

- 1 share a story
- 2 find out who you are (dna readings of friends are interesting)
- 3 share a dish (a meal with someone...)
- 4 feel the beat (listen to someone else's music)
- 5 find one fact
- 6 write a poem
- 7 join the movement (play your part in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers)

TWO STORIES:

1) The Story of Dunsten as told by himself to the Secretary of FHN:

Hi Rev David, I am happy to share my story.

I, Dunsten was born in Sri Lanka. I was brought up with many Christian values and God's grace was with me throughout my life in Sri Lanka. I am from a Tamil village in the east province of Sri Lanka, where most of the problems and conflicts happened during the war time between LTTE and Sri Lankan government.

My Dad left the country in 1990 because of the risk to life but he managed to sponsor my mother and my brother in 2003 to come to UK. My Dad was a refugee in UK so that he could apply for a family reunion visa. I was unable to come to join the family as my father's solicitor failed to apply for a visa for me with the family visa.

Though I had my Aunty and grandma in my village, I was staying in hostels miles away from my native place in order to continue my studies in Engineering.

I had several problems during this time in Sri Lanka such linked to the civil war, different emotions and mental instability. However, I came to UK in Sep 2009 to join my family. I worked hard while doing further studies in Nottingham University. I didn't have money to pay for my tuition fee. I requested my Methodist Church to lend me some money for education. The Church Council refused. But God helped me through, a man in the church kindly lent me some money. Thanks be to our God. My mum also sold her jewels to pay my tuition fee.

It was a difficult time to see my family being in a rented house with an income from one person, my dad, and also, I was not sure about my future. Then, in October 2010, when I visited Croydon Home Office regarding my refugee status, **I was detained by the authorities. I was at the detention centre near Heathrow. They intended to deport me back to Sri Lanka.** I suffered a separation from my family again. **I was detained for 27 days.** But God miraculously helped me to get out from this detention place with the refugee status to live in this country. All glory to God.

I eventually received the visa in January 2011. I applied for a job in engineering as I wanted to stick with my profession. I failed to get a job for two years of trying due to several reasons such as lack of experience, limited leave to remain visa and my ethnicity, even though I had enough qualifications and experience from Sri Lanka.

I got into teaching in 2013. I managed to do another qualification in teaching. God directed me through this path for me to move on in my career.

I got married in 2015. Home Office took around **40 days to give permission to marry** in the process of registration.

I was unable to progress in my teaching career because **Home Office took more than two and a half years to process my Permanent Resident's visa.**

During this visa processing time, I was unable to do anything which might include travelling abroad, changing jobs, buying anything for finance or loan, sponsoring, applying further studies etc. God had clearly drawn his plan upon me.

Finally, I got the PR in 2018 and in the light of God I became a **British citizen**. I travelled to my home country in October 2018 to see my grandma. Praise the Lord. God has been blessing me with many things to glorify him. We are recently blessed with a baby boy.

All praise and thanks to our Lord Jesus always!

Dunsten

Dunsten speaks of 'the miracle' of his being freed from detention and returned to his family. It was truly that! It is something I will never forget. Dunsten is now a highly valued Local Preacher in a Circuit which is enriched with Christian refugees, with others from Sri Lanka and many from Zimbabwe.

2) The Story of Naqeeb, a young man from Afghanistan:

When I was fifteen, I began working as an interpreter for my cousin in Afghanistan. I speak many languages including Hindi, Farsi, Pashto and English and we were interviewing people about the war in my home country trying to give them a voice to express themselves.

But when the Taliban authorities found out about what I was doing they started sending me threatening letters. They said that if I didn't stop, they were going to make me pay....

After that I came to the UK as part of the 'Gateway Protection Programme' (a way for some refugees to resettle in the UK without claiming asylum. It was really hard to leave my family – I had never been anywhere without them before. I cried every evening for my first two weeks in the UK. But when I was reunited with my big brother I felt secure again.

It's very difficult to leave your home town and come to live in an unknown country. Luckily, because I already spoke English, it was easier for me to make friends at school. My social worker helped me a lot too and I spent a lot of time at my local table tennis club. They really welcomed me – it became my second home! I'm also involved in a theatre production called 'Borderline' – it's a comedy about life in 'the Jungle' refugee camp in Calais.

The people in the UK have been really kind, but I still miss my family, especially my mum and dad. But I feel proud that I've managed to settle here and start a new life on my own. My great ambition is to go to university and become a solicitor.

According to UNICEF, Afghanistan is the world's most dangerous place to be a child.

QUESTION: Why do refugees leave their homes?

ANSWER: There are many reasons a person might fear harm in their country of origin. They could be fleeing from a war there, or they could be persecuted (treated badly) because of their religion, beliefs, race, political views, gender or membership of a particular social group.

FIVE FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES:

- 1) There are an estimated 21 million refugees in the world
- 2) The UK is home to less than 2% of the world's refugees; only a quarter of people applying for asylum in the UK have their claim accepted
- 3) Most, 86%, live in poor countries, often in refugee camps
- 4) Many hope to return home at some point in the future if the situation there changes
- 5) Last year in the UK, the majority of asylum seekers came from Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.