

Refugee Sunday

Worship Resource for 18 June 2023

Finding Freedom



Uniting Church in Australia
Social Justice WA

Introduction

The Social Justice Commission of the Uniting Church, Synod of Western Australia, has collated a series of prayers and reflections that could be used in worship for Refugee Sunday, 18 June 2023.

This liturgy does not link to the Lectionary readings for that Sunday on this occasion as those readings do not readily relate to the area of refugees or the theme of 'Finding Freedom'. Other alternative verses from scripture are included in the service.

The image included, 'RefuJesus' by *Naked Pastor* is a representation of Jesus as a refugee. The artist wrote of it:

"This image represents refugees. If you believe in Jesus, you should be able to see Jesus in the rejected, marginalised, persecuted, fleeing for life, for a better life. People ask me what's in his burlap, I leave it to them to tell me. His halo is a barbed wire."

Children's Resources

We include two links to resources for children that may also be useful. These are:

https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/learning_about_refugee_stories_at_sunday_school.pdf

<https://my.salvos.org.au/toolkit/resource/childrens-ministry-resource-pack---refugee-week-2021/2122/>

Other Actions

We recommend that a special offertory be taken for CARAD (Centre for Asylum seekers, Refugees and Detainees), or a similar organisation as part of the service.

Other actions could include opportunities to write to your local MP, or to assist with refugee sponsorship. Two links for these sorts of actions are:

https://action.refugeecouncil.org.au/refugee_intake_email_your_mp

<https://refugeesponsorship.org.au/what-we-do/crisp/>

The WA Social Justice Commission Team



Uniting Church in Australia
Social Justice WA

A service for Refugee Sunday

'Finding Freedom'

18 June 2023



'RefuJesus' by Naked Pastor

Artist David aka Naked Pastor says of the image 'RefuJesus' - "This image represents refugees. If you believe in Jesus, you should be able to see Jesus in the rejected, marginalised, persecuted, fleeing for life, for a better life. People ask me what's in his burlap, I leave it to them to tell me. His halo is a barbed wire."

Note: Please remember to create a safe space for worship in this service. Some of the themes covered such as war and incarceration could be unsettling for people, and particularly if you have those among you who have been refugees or asylum seekers.

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CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus our Lord is risen.

Lord, may we experience the power of your resurrection and live by it.

The call of freedom has been sounded.

Lord, may we respond as the community of the free.

It concerns everyone of us personally,

in this place, in our humanity, and in this world of ours.

Lord, may the spirit and gift of your freedom

break the spell of our fears, and send us out

as obedient rebels, lovers of life's depths

and your disciples forever. Amen.

(Terry Falla, *Be our Freedom Lord*)

SONG

Suggestions:

TIS 178 Praise the God who changes places; **or**

TIS 179 Praise with joy the world's Creator; **or**

TIS 181 Come, O God of all the earth.

OPENING PRAYER

God of hospitality and refuge,
come to us here in this place of security and safety.

Remind us that you are the God Almighty;
large enough for all people,
all nations, all tongues.
Help us, with the presence of your Holy Spirit,
to be able to create space

for those who seek asylum and refuge.
In the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen.

(Source: UCA 2016 resource)

INTRODUCTION TO THEME

What does it mean to be free?

To live without the fear of war, to have your basic human rights upheld, to live in equality and without the fear of persecution are just some of the examples of what freedom can entail. Every day millions of people across the world embark on dangerous journeys for the sole purpose of finding safety and freedom. From Australia to nations across the globe, settling into a new environment after experiencing the perils of a refugee's journey can also provide the opportunity to live, to love and to dream.

In 2023 we, as the followers of Christ, are encouraged to show compassion and celebrate the resilience that makes up parts of our wider community. Freedom should not be a privilege, it should be a way of life.

SCRIPTURE SENTENCES

Leviticus 19: 34

³⁴The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Matthew 25:35

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,

REFLECTION

(the following reflection was written for Common Grace in 2022)

After years in Australia's detention system, asylum seeker Fazel Khodayar found hope through the action, support and friendship of others including Lisa Bridle. Here Lisa and Fazel share about their friendship and the powerful story of calling together for freedom from detention at Brisbane's Kangaroo Point Central Hotel.

Lisa: Until early 2020, despite being very disturbed by Australia's treatment of refugees, my efforts (like attending an occasional rally) were frankly half-hearted. In April that year, as COVID hit, a group of refugees began afternoon protests from their detention at Kangaroo Point Central Hotel. Their banners hung over two levels read: Where is Justice? 7 Years Torture. No Crime 7 Years in Detention.

Activists staged COVID safe walking protests in solidarity and within weeks, a 24 hour community blockade was established, and then numerous large rallies where the men inside gave heartbreaking speeches by phone.

Over eight months, we also held Sunday Solidarity faith vigils, where we gathered to pray, to silently reflect, to sing, and to use ritual to proclaim values of love, compassion, justice, and welcome towards refugees.

As a Christian, I felt compelled to BE there, standing with my sign on the streets of Kangaroo Point, called by the words: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:35-36

I wanted to say to the men "you are not forgotten; you are seen; we are fighting for your freedom".

Two years on, and after nine years of detention, these men from that Kangaroo Point balcony are free. Fazel, one of those men, is a warm, funny, joyful man who has become a loyal and supportive friend, sharing Christmas day, holidays, meals and visits at his home and ours.

I am not sure if it is possible for him and others to heal from nine years of detention, while there is still no settlement certainty for his future. He has faced trauma and the theft of years of his life.

I now realise that my previous inaction stemmed not from lack of care, but from feeling utterly powerless in the face of unrelentingly cruel public policy.

But I learnt that holding a sign, forming a community of resistance, and offering and receiving friendship, ALL make a difference, no matter how small.

(The following story includes a reference to self-harm. Please take care as you read.)

Fazel: We had been in detention for so long. We had no hope. We decided to try to protest, to ask people to notice us. We wanted to make banners but we had nothing. We hid black plastic garbage bags, and took paper from the activity class.

One of the guards gave us the sticky tape.

It was hard because we had no scissors to cut paper and tape. We hid razor blades we'd taken from disposable shavers. We worked on the banners after the last head count at night and hid them when our rooms were searched. I also made two horns to make a big sound.

Before the protests, I didn't care about freedom. I was rejected for a US program and I lost hope. I had been collecting tablets in my room to hurt myself, but the guards found them.

When people saw us and supported us, it gave us hope. After so many years offshore, we felt that we are not alone, people do care about us and about democracy.

For me, I changed my mind about Australians. Before I thought Australians were racist people who were all against refugees. But the protests changed my mind 100%.

Now I know most Australians are good and believe in freedom. After many months of protests, it was hard to keep hopeful. They took the banners, some of us got sent back to Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation, and they locked off the balconies, but still I remembered all the people who cared.

I got my freedom in March 2021. When I first got out, I was scared all the time. Even if someone smiled at me, I felt scared. I couldn't trust. I would think it was a trap and I would get sent back to jail. I am still scared when I see the police.

I feel hope with the change of government but then again it was Labor who sent us to Manus. I might go to Canada. It is a good country but too cold.

After so much suffering, friendship is so important to me. I hope I can stay here where I have so many good friends.
Then I will start my life again.

PRAYER

Lord God,
Sometimes we can feel powerless in the face of suffering,
but we turn to you for hope and comfort.
Let us feel your protection, love and grace in times of hardship and let us be your hands and feet in times of strength.
Thank you Jesus for exemplifying what it means to love the stranger.
May we continue to reach out to others in need and love one another.
Amen

www.commongrace.org.au/you_are_not_forgotten_you_are_seen

SONG

Suggestions:

TIS 621 O God of every nation; **or**

TIS 629 When I needed a neighbour; **or**

TIS 630 The law of Christ alone can make us free; **or**

TIS 631 Father, Lord of all creation; **or**

TIS 657 God of freedom, God of justice; **or**

TIS 697 All the sleepy should have a place to sleep

SCRIPTURE SENTENCE

Hebrews 13:1-3

Let mutual affection continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Compassionate One,
our society has failed you.
You were a refugee, seeking safety and freedom,
and we did not welcome you.
You were naked and exposed, with inadequate shelter and insufficient pay,
and we did not fight with you for equal rights.
You were fearful of being detained or deported without a just trial,
and we did not provide you sanctuary.
We seek forgiveness for the ways we have forsaken you,
and offer our thanks for the communities,
people, and organizations who have
extended welcome,
advocated for justice; and
provided sanctuary to people seeking refuge despite opposition.

Teacher,
your instructions are clear:
We shall not oppress migrant people, nor deprive them of justice,
nor practice extortion or commit robbery against them;*
We shall love strangers as ourselves,
for we have all been strangers;
We shall share our harvest, our homes, and our lives with others,
thus extending the same hospitality that you have selflessly shared.
We shall advocate for the human rights of all people.
Give us the steadfast persistence needed to follow your commandments
in these challenging times,
remembering that the love and respect that we show to each other
is the love that we show to you,
our Compassionate Teacher.
Amen

(Source: [Refugee Rights Day in Canada](#))

VIDEO CLIP 'Who is a refugee'

[World Refugee Sunday - Defender on Vimeo](#)

(vimeo.com/715851735)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Father God,
We recognise and celebrate your particular care for refugees
and displaced people. Help us to see your face in each and every
person who has been forced to leave their place of safety.
Lord in your mercy,
Hear us and prompt us

We pray particularly for the situation in Syria. For the war that continues to create new refugees 13 years after it began. For those who still reside in refugee camps and have not yet found a new home. Though there is no clear end in sight to the conflict, we know that you are a God who breaks down barriers, who can make a way where none seems available. Lord in your mercy,

Hear us and prompt us

We pray into the situation in Myanmar and Bangladesh. For the Rohingya (ruh-hin-juh) Muslims who have fled horrific persecution in their home country and have little prospect of a safe return. For the refugees, we pray peace and resolve, for all those working in the world's largest refugee camp we pray for energy and compassion, for the leaders of Myanmar we pray conviction and repentance.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear us and prompt us

We pray for Ukraine. For those fleeing, those fighting, and those leading. In this Refugee Week, we particularly think of those who have left their homes. May they find a warm welcome in the countries that have taken them in, and may we be the ones to offer that welcome if we are able.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear us and prompt us

As the climate crisis threatens to create millions more displaced people, help us to approach this as a permanent calling, ministering in these situations with resolve, not defeatism. We pray that we may be ready and able to serve refugees at home and abroad in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, as long as we ever can.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear us and prompt us

Holy God, you are our refuge and shelter, you take sanctuary in us. Strengthen our resolve to be people of sanctuary, to build cultures of welcome and hospitality, and to act with protective care for all who need sanctuary. We pray for a world without war in which all can live safely and without fear in their own homes. In the Name of Christ.

Amen.*

www.allwecan.org.uk

OFFERING in support of the work of CARAD

SONG

Suggestions:

TIS 657 God of freedom, God of justice; **or**

TIS 690 Beauty for brokenness;

or

The Summons (tune TIS 679)

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the pris'ner free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your com-pa-ny I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John L. Bell and Graham Maule
from **God Never Sleeps: Songs from the Iona Community**

BLESSING AND COMMISSION

God, bless and travel with all who seek freedom in our world.

And may the Spirit now go with us

as we leave this place,

prompting us to serve the most marginalised

in our community and in the world.

Amen.