

18 August 2024 – Proclaiming the Year of Jubilee

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. [Isaiah 61:1-2 & Luke 4:18-19]

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement **April**

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ – Esquimalt and Songhees nations. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land through the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting past and current injustice. We ask God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ ***Come, now is the time to worship***

Call to Worship (Psalm 146 – selected verses with a sung response)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

➤ ***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear God's voice!*** (350)

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever

➤ ***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!*** (350)

The LORD watches over the strangers, and upholds the orphan and the widow, but the Lord brings the way of the wicked to ruin.

➤ ***Oh come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
and give God the glory, who great things has done.*** (350)

➤ ***Where cross the crowded ways of life*** **760**

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Creator, Christ, and Spirit, when our soul hungers for fulfillment, you give us the Bread of Life. When our soul thirsts for communion with you, you refresh us with living water. When we long for what is authentic, you show us the Way, the Truth and the Life. Creator, Christ, and Spirit, receive our praise and gratitude as we gather in worship.

Forgive us when we forget what is truly important. Forgive the sins we try to hide or ignore. Jesus calls us to release the oppressed, but we have not remembered refugees – people who are fleeing oppression.

Around the globe, tens of millions are caught between the future and the past – caught between looking for a new home while longing to return to their old homes. There are men, women, and children who have had their lives put on hold – waiting for the world's solution to their predicament – waiting for the people of God to offer a hand of assistance. By your grace, forgive us for being slow to answer your call – forgetting to speak out in your name.

Eternal God, we confess that we have tried to hide from you because we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves and apart from you. We have turned from our neighbours and refused to bear the burdens of others. We have ignored the pain of the world – passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. In your great mercy, forgive our sins and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will and follow Jesus...

➤ *Take, O take me as I am – summon out what I shall be – set your seal upon my heart and live in me.*

God is tender hearted and gracious to all, offering forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Trust in God's grace – be kind to one another, forgiving others as you have been forgiven.

Prayer for Understanding (responsive) **Lilian**

Liberator Christ, you came into a holy place and read the sacred word about sight for the blind and freedom for prisoners.

Come to this place now. Read these words to *us* until our own eyes are opened, our faith unlocked, and we can see the world as it is – as it could be.

Until the yearnings of ordinary people are taken seriously; until your kingdom is celebrated everywhere, and your church is good news to all. Amen.

Scripture **Ruth 2** [OT 242]

Narrator-Jim / Ruth-Lilian / Naomi-Laura / Boaz-Dennis / others-Steve

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, *"Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor."*

She said to her, *"Go, my daughter."*

So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, *"The Lord be with you."*

They answered, *"The Lord bless you."*

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, *"To whom does this young woman belong?"*

The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, *"She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers. So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."*

Then Boaz said to Ruth, *"Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."*

Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, *"Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?"*

But Boaz answered her, *"All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"*

Then she said, *"May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."*

At mealtime Boaz said to her, *"Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine."* So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, *"Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."*

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her

mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her, *"Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you."*

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, *"The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."*

Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, *"Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!"* Naomi also said to her, *"The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin."*

Then Ruth the Moabite said, *"He even said to me, Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest."*

Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, *"It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field."* So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Matthew 25:31-45 [NT 29]

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, *"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."*

Then the righteous will answer him, *"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"*

And the king will answer them, *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

Then he will say to those at his left hand, *"You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me*

no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

Then they also will answer, *“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”*

Then he will answer them, *“Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”*

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.

Message *Remembering Refugees*

Today we are talking about refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people but I will often use the collective term, refugees to include all of these. I tried to research numbers to give an idea of the magnitude of the current crisis but that proved challenging as some numbers include immigrants, some break down by where refugees as coming from (Syria, Ukraine, Palestine) and other organize by where they are located. I did my best to convey the situation, but as I am no statistician, please take the numbers with a grain of salt recognizing that they are ballpark rather than specific.

The Bible begins with the movement of God’s Spirit and ends with John in exile on the Isle of Patmos. Between those two events, the uprooted people of God seek safety, sanctuary, and refuge, and the living God gives directions for welcoming the stranger. The Bible could be seen as the ultimate handbook by, for, and about migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There is no question that God wants us to think about and to remember refugees.

In Genesis chapter 2, God first creates Adam and Eve and gives instructions on living in the Garden. Adam and Eve do not follow God’s directions and are eventually exiled, but not before God sews skins together to cover them – protecting them from the elements. God’s concern for strangers moving throughout the world begins at this point and continues throughout the Bible.

Welcoming the stranger is the central theme of biblical hospitality. It is an inclusive hospitality that always makes room for the stranger – no person is to be excluded. According to Old Testament law there are two types of strangers, sometimes called sojourners or aliens: the strangers who chose to fit in with Israelite culture and religion and the strangers who choose to retain an independent sense of identity.

Biblical law is remarkably generous towards and supportive of the strangers in Israel. It acknowledges that such people have no power and are frequently poor and needy. Yet they are accorded fair and hospitable treatment. Strangers were protected from abuse, protected from unfair treatment when employed by Israelites, and protected from unfair treatment in the courts. They were also offered various degrees of social inclusion depending on their willingness to conform. Strangers were to be treated as native-born Israelites with only a few restrictions.

The biblical laws relating to the stranger in the land of Israel model a generous and hospitable approach to foreigners. In Israel's case this was motivated by the personal experience of once being strangers themselves.

God's chosen people, the people of Israel, were refugees. For ten generations, they grew in numbers and prospered in Egypt. Then a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt. Regarding the people of Israel with suspicion and hostility, he mistreated and persecuted them, and forced them to work as slaves. God raised up a leader, Moses, and sent him to tell Pharaoh to set the people free. When the king refused, God led the people out of Egypt. But their suffering was not over. For forty years, these refugees wandered in the wilderness until they found a new home in the Promised Land. We could characterize much of the Old Testament as an anthology about refugees.

In the book of Ruth, one family is the focal point. It begins with Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, who take Moabite wives, having to leave Judah and move to Moab because of a famine. Eventually all the men die, and the women are left alone. Naomi is a stranger in a strange land. She learns that there is no longer famine in Judah, so she exercises her right to return. However, she does not go alone. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, returns with her. The tables are turned – Ruth becomes the stranger in a strange land – Ruth becomes the refugee. In the reading from today we hear about Boaz adhering closely to God's requirement to offer hospitality to the stranger. He permits Ruth to gather food, protects her, and eventually marries her – bringing the undocumented sojourner into the fold, making her part of the family.

When we come to the New Testament and look at the predicament of refugees, the first question to ask is, "What did Jesus do?"

Jesus broke into history with a kingdom from heaven which encompassed those whom Israel conventionally thought to be its least likely subjects – the poor, the women, the children, the socially excluded – even Gentile sinners like us. Jesus redefined the people of God saying, *many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

The second thing that Jesus did was to insist that those who acknowledge him as the Christ should care for the poor and the powerless. Jesus expected his followers to imitate his deep concern for those in trouble, whoever they may be.

The biggest objection to acting in love toward refugees is the risk that it will open the flood gates or that they will somehow betray our kindness. Perhaps the best answer to such fears is to recognize that true faith and discipleship always involve taking a risk. When Jesus reaches out to the Samaritan woman his disciples are scandalized. He risks serious loss of reputation in a society obsessed with status, honour and shame. When he heals the blind and the lame, he risks being inundated with needy people, and sometimes that is just what happens. Such risks did not deter him – among the risks is the possibility that by showing *hospitality to strangers, some have entertained angels without knowing it.* [Hebrews 13:2]

The Christian response of welcoming the stranger, in full knowledge of the risks, is not based on some idea of Christian “niceness”. Rather, the Christian warrant for a humanitarian response to refugees is grounded in God’s love for all, especially for the outcast and the stranger.

Perhaps the most compelling argument Christ gave for caring for the stranger can be found in today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew: *...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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*

Food for refugees, here and abroad – water to the migrants crossing the desert – an open church door to the stranger with nowhere to turn – clothing to the migrant newly arrived in the north or the refugee being resettled in your town – medical care for migrant workers, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers – prison visits to detained asylum seekers and immigrants – all are ways to fulfill the mandate to offer hospitality to the stranger. Responding to these needs is the foundation of a ministry to the strangers in our communities and our land and are ways to practice inclusive hospitality.

Jesus was very clear in his message: solidarity with *the least of these* indicates relationship with him – hospitality and generous welcome to those most vulnerable is a sign of people on the journey of Christian faith.

As of May 2024, more than 120 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. This includes: 43.4 million refugees and 63.3 million internally displaced people. Others are displaced by

wars, earthquakes, fires, floods, drought or famine. While there are those refugees and internally displaced people who wander in the wilderness, many more find temporary food and shelter in refugee camps. Most refugees want to return to their home communities, but sometimes, refugees are not welcome to return home.

These kinds of numbers are overwhelming. Even the number of refugees welcomed into Canada each year might seem daunting to us – averaging 30 to 40 thousand. Presbyterian World Service and Development reminds us that no one is a refugee by choice. Refugees and internally displaced people are forced to flee their homes out of fear for their lives and liberty.

What the numbers don't describe is the sheer courage and hope characterizing most refugees, wherever they are. The refugee ministry of PWS&D is a response to Christ's call to serve and defend those who are vulnerable and persecuted. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an official Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. This enables Presbyterian congregations to sponsor refugees to resettle in Canada. PWS&D also advocates for refugees through several Canadian refugee advocacy groups, including the Canadian Council for Refugees.

We are a small congregation, and it does take committed human resources to sponsor refugees, however we can support this work through our educational awareness, prayers and donations. Gifts to the van Mossel Refugee Support fund help provide quality accompaniment to congregations and groups engaged in sponsoring refugees to Canada, as well as supporting refugees around the world. The van Mossel Refugee Support Fund was established in honour of the late Rev. L.S. "Bert" and Mrs. Lorna van Mossel who were both strong supporters of PWS&D and had a deep concern for the plight of those in need in Canada and around the world. Lorna was a dear friend to the late Flora Whiteford who was a member of Knox until her death in 2011.

Did you know there is a Refugee Olympic Team made up of independent Olympic participants who are refugees? In March 2016, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach announced the creation of the Refugee Olympic Athletes Team, as a symbol of hope for all refugees in the world to raise global awareness of the scale of the migrant crisis in Europe. In September 2017, the Olympic Refugee Foundation was established to supporting refugees over the long term. Cindy Ngamba became the first person to win an Olympic medal for the Refugee Olympic Team, winning a bronze medal in the women's 75kg boxing event at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

In the current refugee crisis around the world, Christians have a golden opportunity to live out the gospel – to illustrate the gospel in which we receive, unexpectedly, a lavish

welcome from God. We must recognize the stranger as one of us – learn to see the borders and barriers between “us” and “them” are merely human constructions that serve to justify exploitation and violence. The truth is that we are sisters and brothers, one people under God. Paul writes to the Galatians: *God came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Amen*

➤ *When the poor ones*

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Offering and Prayer

The Psalms urge us to give thanks to God at all times, for everything God has provided. In gratitude, we offer a portion of what God has given us. Trust that God will bless and multiply our gifts to serve divine purposes here and in places of deepest need.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Loving God, we offer our gifts with thanksgiving, grateful for all we have received in Christ and in creation. Bless our gifts and our lives, so that we may live to bring you glory, and share your love in our broken world. Amen

Pastoral Prayers / The Lord's Prayer

God of Abraham and Sarah, you are a God who cares for people, especially when they must leave their homes and travel to new places. We pray for all who are leaving home behind today, especially those who are leaving because of war or persecution. Protect them from danger and provide for all their needs.

God of the Exodus, you are a God who cares for people and who hears the cries of the oppressed. We pray for all who are suffering oppression, especially economic oppression. Bring relief. Send your Spirit to work among the rich and powerful. We pray that all peoples in our world may flourish. Use us to bring about change.

God of Ruth, you are a God who cares for the stranger and who provides the homeless with homes. We pray for all who are settling in new homes in strange lands today. We pray for their embrace into new communities. We pray for work and ways to provide food for families, for help in learning new languages.

Lord Jesus, you lived among us and showed us how to live. Please help us by your Spirit to show your love and compassion and to see you in the faces of those who are the least among us. Help us to feed the hungry and thirsty, to clothe the naked, to care for the

prisoners, to welcome the stranger. And help us to work for justice. Bring your kingdom here on earth quickly. In Jesus name we pray in confident hope... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ ***Go, make a difference***

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Blessing

Go in gratitude, relying on the presence of Christ as bread for your journey. Go in peace, with Christ as your friend and companion.

May the God who feeds the hungry and frees the prisoners – who gives sight to the blind and release to the captives, fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope as God the Spirit brings you growth – God the Son tends you with wisdom – and God the Source assures you that you will never walk alone. Amen

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day***

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