

July 7, 2024 – Bonni-Belle Pickard – refugees and immigration

Pre-service

Longing for light – StF 706

Beauty for brokenness – StF 693

Let us build a house – StF 409

Will you come and follow me – StF 673

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship -- Hebrews 13:1-2

Let mutual love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,

for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Longing for light – StF 706

Prayer of Confession

Beauty for brokenness – StF 693

Intro to interview

Interview with Steve Tinnings (Joint Public Issues Team)

Further reflections

Let us build a house – StF 409

Intercessions and Closing liturgy --

Will you come and follow me – StF 673

<https://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/>

Confessions

“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.”

Matthew 25:45-46

Challenge

I was hungry
And you formed a working group
And discussed my hunger.

I was imprisoned
And you crept off quietly to your chapel
And prayed for my release.

I was naked
And in your mind, you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick
And you knelt and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless
And you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely
And you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy, so close to God,
But I'm still very hungry and lonely and cold.

- A Guide: Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants: Welcoming the Stranger
 - Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

Politics and Faith ...

So much of our current social climate is about the 'people' making demands for their needs –
If something is going wrong, we want to protest –
 We want to find someone to blame – someone to take responsibility –
 We want someone else to sort things out for us.

That's been abundantly clear over the past several weeks of political campaigning,
 And especially the on-the-streets interviews with constituents...
Some of the broadcasters have specifically asked: what are the biggest problems you face?
 What do you want the politicians to do for you?

JFK: 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.'

We've come a long way from that point of view –
 A true leader is not one who solves all the problems
 But one who encourages and enables a community to work together
 To meet the challenges it faces.

I see this culture of 'demand for services' in so many fields –
 In football, the manager is replaced whenever he hasn't 'delivered'
 On what the fans want: a win!
As above, in politics, if the government isn't providing the services we want
 (all the while reducing our taxes so there's less money to pay for those services)
 Then we vote them out.

That's different than voting for policies we believe in
 And contributing towards making those policies work for all...
In essence, when we keep demanding lower taxes,
 We, too, are demanding that others care for us
 Rather than taking our own responsibilities to be part of the solution.

I see this happening in churches as well.
 We have developed a culture
 where we expect 'the circuit' to bail us out of difficult situations –
 I'm often told that 'in the old circuit', they came and helped us out.
The reality is that there are very few left in this circuit
 who are *can* help out the others – and they are overstretched and exhausted.
We like to blame the others for not being willing to help
 All the while assuming that others have spare capacity – which few do.

And so our churches keep trying to help out in the community –
 And the community will howl furiously when those resources are no longer available.
But have we only become a place of hand-outs,
 Rather than a community that works together?
Very few are willing even to become members of a church anymore –
 Because they might be expected to take on responsibility for others.

Stepping back for the long view, we all – church and society – have become demanding
 That others take care of us. And if they don't, we will protest.

There is another way, and it's the way that Jesus points us towards...

In the well-known story of the Jesus and the disciples feeding the five thousand,
The disciples come first to Jesus with the problem,

Suggesting they turn the people away...

But Jesus says, "You feed them."

And when they protest that they don't have enough to feed such crowds,

He asks them to bring what they have –

And he blesses it...

And, as we know, there's enough for everyone with more to spare....

There are many ways to hear this story,

But what comes to me today is this:

Jesus relies on everyone to contribute –

Not just those who are 'leaders', but *everyone*.

Jesus isn't asking us for what we don't have, but for us to share what we do have.

And then Jesus blesses what we bring.

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Recently I met Rev Steve Tinnings, a Baptist minister
who works with JPIT, Joint Public Issues Team,
an ecumenical group who address issues of social and political interest.

I was intrigued with his story about how a local congregation,

Taking seriously God's command to care for stranger,

Managed to not only care for the stranger

But change the whole political narrative in their town in the process.

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We, as Christians, following the God who raised Jesus from the dead –

Have access to the power of the Holy Spirit to change hearts and minds and
lives.

We are not confined to waiting for the government or the circuit or whatever
authorities

To act for us.

We, in and with God's power, can take action ourselves.

It is important, however, that we do not just become the 'heroes' –

That we take more and more responsibility for ourselves

Until the others are completely absolved from their responsibility.

Our task is to include all – to have eyes and ears and hearts open to discern

What each can do – and to support it.

Not to wear ourselves out –

Not to expect others to do for us,

But to work *together* for the good of all.

Intercessions

Jesus our Saviour, as the disciples shouted out in fear,
You shouted at the storm, "Peace, be still!"

We pray for women, children, and men who are living in constant terror;
For those who have fled, losing everything;
For those who carry raw wounds from assault, trauma, or grief;
For those who have invested their last hope in a new beginning,
Far from everything and everyone they have known;
For those who have fallen prey to ruthless strangers or false friends;
For those who have risked their lives and their loved ones' lives
In unseaworthy boats on perilous seas.

Jesus our Saviour, fill our lungs with your breath,
That we may raise higher our shout for your justice
Against the dehumanising surges and waves of hostility
That plunge so many into hopelessness, fear and desperation.
Breathe your compassion into our hearts
That our words may be embodied in active love.

May all your sisters and brothers – our sisters and brothers –
At last be able to be still,
In your life-giving peace. Amen.

Benediction

"We saw a stranger yesterday.
We put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place,
And with the sacred Name of the triune God,
He blesses us and our house,
Our cattle and our dear ones,^b]⁹
As the Lark says in her song,
Often, often, often goes the Christ,
In the stranger's guise.

■ *The Gaelic Rune of Hospitality, from the Carmen Gadelica*