

Cloud by day and fire by night

Opening Sentences

Ps 139:11

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
And the light around me become night",
**even the darkness is not dark to you;
for night is as bright as the day
and darkness is as light to you.**

HYMN R&S 399 ***Stay with us, O Lord Jesus Christ***

Taize style – as long as it needs be

Stay with us, O Lord Jesus Christ:
night will soon fall.
Then stay with us, O Lord Jesus Christ:
light in our darkness.

Profession of Faith

God is.

**Maker of day and night,
Darkness and light.**

God is.

**Walking beside us.
Working inside us.**

God is.

**Beyond and before us.
Within and outwith us.**

God is.

**And because God is,
We are.**

Scripture reading Exodus 13:17-18a, 21-22

Refugee story: Mary

The world is experiencing the largest mass exodus of people since after WWII as refugees flee war-torn countries and persecution. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) reported that by the end of 2014, nearly 60 million people had been forced from their homes by violence.¹ The number has increased in 2015 as our television news witnesses to the continuing waves of people risking life and limb on flimsy boats across the Mediterranean Sea, in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and in Southeast Asia. This year alone

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase
News Stories, 18 June 2015. Accessed 11/11/2015.

more than 3,000 refugees have died trying to cross the Mediterranean.² Volunteers on the island of Lesbos ask: *How much longer can we witness the drowning of a child day after day?*

That we might not forget those in need, that we might hear as God hears the cries of those who suffer, tonight and tomorrow night we will hear a refugee's story, brought to us by Brother Vaughn of Praxis which provides advice, support and a welcome meeting place for vulnerable migrants and refugees in London (<http://www.praxis.org.uk/>).

This is a piece of Mary's story:

Mary was born in Eretria and came to the UK in 2012 in her late teens. Aged five she had fled with her family to Ethiopia because of her father's persecution. Mary lived with her mother in Addis Ababa for ten years, until her mother died and her uncle moved Mary back to Eretria. While in Ethiopia Mary had converted to Pentecostal Christianity, which is illegal in Eretria. After she returned to Eretria, she continued worshipping as a Pentecostal Christian in secret. One Sunday morning, while the small group Mary met with was worshipping in a private home, there was a loud banging on the front door – which crashed open to reveal soldiers who set about beating and arresting the worshippers. With sacks over their faces and wrists handcuffed behind their backs, the group was transported to what appeared to be a prison. After beating Mary with a long stick, soldiers took her on her own to an empty, dirty room, pushing and punching her in the back until she fell to the ground face down. Another soldier, who appeared to be most senior, entered the room, dismissed the others and raped her, saying *If you tell anyone about this I will kill you.*

Mary (then 17 years old) was held for two weeks until her uncle (also a soldier) found her and arranged a bribe for her release. When she told him what had happened, he was devastated and cried. He said *I know someone who can get you out of here. If you won't listen to me about your religion, you have to go. I brought you here to be with me and don't want to see you die.* Shortly afterwards, she was woken at 3am and placed in the hands of Ali, a guide her uncle knew well and trusted. With seven others, she was taken by van to the Sudanese border and then by truck to Khartoum. From there, she travelled by stages, handed from one agent to another: four months in Libya, then a boat crammed with 250 people crossing the Mediterranean to Italy on a 17 hour journey that was aborted more than ten times before reaching the Italian shore. In Italy, Mary continued to journey with a new friend Safia, who helped her to catch a bus to Rome and three weeks later a train to Paris, then Hazebrouck and finally to Calais. Mary and her friend waited in Calais for two to three weeks in an abandoned warehouse, until someone arranged for them to be taken into England by van. Once in the UK, the truck stopped for petrol and the driver told the eight passengers to go. Not knowing any better, they walked along the motorway and were picked up by the police and placed in detention for 24 hours. They stayed in a church overnight in London and were then taken to Cardiff and eventually being provided with NASS (national asylum support service) accommodation. Mary's first application for asylum was refused. Praxis is now

²<https://www.sim.co.uk/sites/default/files/Resources/7%20Days%20of%20Prayer%20for%20Syrian%20Refugees.pdf> From the Serving in Mission UK website, 7 Days of Prayer for Syrian Refugees. Accessed 11/11/2015.

helping her to fully document her story, tracking down the woman who converted Mary, so that she may make another asylum application. They pray that “by God’s grace justice will be done.”

A Reflection

From the beginning of time, people have been on the move.
In search of clean water, of game to hunt and berries to pick;
Looking for land that would sustain life;
Fleeing from persecution, violence or war;
Hoping for a new life, a better life.
The history of humanity is a story of mass and small migrations.
So too our ancestors in faith were on the move –
For all of the above reasons and more:
in response to a still small voice calling them
into a future they could not imagine.

God’s people are a restless people,
Not content with the status quo
But drawn by the vision painted by prophets and poets
Intoxicated with the possibility of a better world,
A world of peace and justice,
Where each would live under their own fig tree
And none would know want
And swords are beaten into ploughshares.

Each day God calls to us from the edge of our known world
In the faces of the hungry and the refugee,
In the tears of girls ripped from their homes
And sold into sexual slavery,
In the hope shining in those who glimpse
New possibilities.

Like our mothers and fathers in faith,
We are asked to leave behind all we know,
Perhaps some of what we believe,
Surely our grasping of security and certainty,
And to trust the guiding hand of our good God
That all the families of the earth might be blessed
Through the family of God.

It is this restless God we worship and serve
who knows better than we what we need
and who moves us ever closer
toward the commonwealth of justice and peace.

We pray together for God’s guidance, day and night. When I say “God of mercy, God of might”, please respond **Lead us day and night.**

Prayers of the People

Response: God of mercy, God of might, ***Lead us day and night.***

We pray for all who have been torn from their homes by violence, persecution and poverty; for those in camps, in makeshift tents and abandoned buildings, in open country and crowded cities; for those on the road or the water; for those who have lost or left family members and loved ones; for those who have been beaten, abused or raped; for those seeking asylum and those refused it. God of the exodus and the exile, God of the hungry and the hopeful, God whose love does not let one soul go: speak tenderly to the dispossessed, break the rock-hardness of hearts that refuse help, spark the generosity and kindness that will meet the many needs. In this age of unprecedented mass displacement, enable an unprecedented humanitarian response and a renewed global commitment to tolerance and protection for people fleeing conflict and persecution.

God of mercy, God of might, ***Lead us day and night.***

We pray for the Church: may all our work serve your purposes, and in the press of details, may we never forget the larger picture of why we exist: to further your reign of justice and peace. Increase our faith, strengthen our witness and enable our faithfulness, so that the good news of your saving love may be made known in word and deed through your church.

God of mercy, God of might, ***Lead us day and night.***

We pray for our loved ones and for ourselves. In the silence of this moment, we raise our hearts to you that you may take our burdens from us this night. *Silence.* We are grateful for your grace, which forgives us and frees us to love and serve. We are grateful for your strength, which holds the world together and releases us to rest.

We are grateful for your presence, which accompanies us all along the way. As we enter into the night, we commit to your safekeeping our families and others dear to us, each other and ourselves. All praise and honour, glory and blessing be to you, Almighty God, forever and ever. Amen

HYMN ***God of Day and God of Darkness*** Marty Haugen ©1985, GIA Publications, Inc., Gather 319.

Blessing

With a prayer in our hearts for all those who are seeking a safe home, we entrust this weary, war-torn world and ourselves into the hands of our loving God. God grant us the sleep of children who trust their parents to watch over them and awaken us in the morning refreshed and able to follow Christ into the new day.

We hunger and we thirst

Opening Sentences Psalm 42:1-2

As a deer longs for flowing streams,

So my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for the living God.

When shall I behold the face of God?

HYMN *Nada te turbe* Taizé 3x Teach words first

Nada te turbe nada te espante;

quien a Dios tiene nada le falta.

Nada te turbe, nada te espante:

solo Dios basta.

Profession of Faith

Celtic Daily Prayer, A Northumbrian Office

[When I raise my hands, please respond **Today I believe**]

1994, HarperCollins pp.21-22

Lord, You have always given

Bread for the coming day,

And though I am poor,

Today I believe.

Lord, you have always given

Strength for the coming day,

And though I am weak,

Today I believe.

Lord, You have always given

Peace for the coming day,

And though of anxious heart,

Today I believe.

Lord, You have always kept

Me safe in trials,

And now, tried as I am,

Today I believe.

Lord, You have always marked

The road for the coming day,

And though it be hidden,

Today I believe.

Lord, You have always lightened

This darkness of mine,

And though the night is here,

Today I believe.

Lord, you have always spoken
When time was ripe,
And though You be silent now,
Today I believe.

Scripture reading Exodus 16:2-5; Ex 17:1, 3-7 –*readers from other sides of the platform*

Refugee story

[The names in this story have been changed to preserve the family's confidentiality.]

At the age of 13, Ahmed was sold into slavery by one of his own family and trafficked into another country, from which he was brought into the UK legally by a wealthy family as a “house boy” in the 1990's. When he became too old to be a “house boy”, the family told him that he would have a better chance of having his own family if they left him in London. They gave him a little money and told him to go.

At that time Ahmed spoke almost no English and had no idea that he did not have a right to remain in the UK. He eventually found his way to the East End of London where he found work in restaurants as a “washer up”. He was paid a pittance, worked long hours and found lodging on other people's sofas and dirty unsafe lodging houses which cost him most of his pay. He slowly developed his kitchen skills and learned to become a chef. He could not safely return to his own country because the people who had sold him would have killed him before allowing him to reveal to other members of his family what they had done.

Years later whilst visiting a local library he met young woman Tuba who was also from his country. She had been brought to the UK by her husband who had subjected her to years of physical and psychological abuse. She had come to the country as his spouse and eventually gained citizenship but her husband later abandoned Tuba and the children because she had only “given” him daughters not sons. Tuba was broken hearted not for the loss of the husband but because her daughters kept asking where is daddy? She felt scared and vulnerable and had no idea of how to do the most basic things like paying the rent but she loved her children and bravely found out how to do these things for herself.

When Ahmed met her in the local library he realised she was in tears and he asked her if she was OK. A conversation started which later blossomed into friendship. Six months later they were married under Islamic law. This was very much against the wishes of her family who were trying to force her to marry a cousin who she did not know. The family threatened that if she did not conform to their wishes they would tell social services to take her children away from her. Tuba came to Praxis which arranged legal aid to take out non-molestation orders against her family. Under the pressure of it all, Tuba miscarried a child she and Ahmed had conceived.

In the meantime, Ahmed was placed into immigration detention in Dover, far from his new family. His case was not a simple one and took a huge amount of team effort and expense from Praxis, the lawyers and others. Ahmed was eventually

granted leave to remain and was released from detention. Tuba became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy early this year. Ahmed is a devoted and loving father and husband; he supports the family through his work as a chef. His adopted daughters and new baby are doing well.

Reflection

- Getting the simplest things – food, drink, a place to sleep- become seemingly insurmountable obstacles for people on the move. And once they arrive, their needs do not end.
- At the end of their long journey, despite missteps and mistakes, deprivations and griping, conflicts and confrontations, the Hebrew people would assert with confidence that God was with them; that God hears the cries of the oppressed, hears and heeds, and seeks to bring us to security and freedom.
- The experience of the Hebrew people shaped their response to the wanderings of others. When I was a Racial Justice Advocate 10 or so years ago, with concordance in hand, I charted God’s words to the people about strangers and aliens. Again and again, nearly 42 times I seem to remember, the Hebrew Scriptures instruct: *Welcome the stranger; do not oppress them; treat them as a citizen...remember, once you were a stranger.*
- The eyes of the world have been on the desperate plight of refugees risking life and limb to reach Europe. Women, children and men braving rough seas, long journeys and hostility. Nations, communities and churches struggle to respond. The way ahead is not clear, but the discussions and decisions will set the tone and shape how the world will cope with continuing waves of refugees in years to come, whether they be fleeing war and oppression or rising sea levels and desiccated deserts.
- At the heart of the issue are these questions: What is our responsibility one to another within the human family? Has consumer capitalism and the arrogance of individualism so distorted the Western soul that our ears have become deaf and our hearts like stone? How may we grasp once again the perfect love that casts out fear and enables us to welcome the stranger? Will people in years to come be able to say: Surely God was with us?

We pray to be the people God needs us to be. When I say “God who hears earth’s cry”, please respond ***Feed us or we die.***

Prayers of the People

Response: God who hears earth’s cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

We pray

For the hungry in our world, and for those who have too much,
God who hears earth’s cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For the lonely, and for the crowd,
God who hears earth’s cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For the sick, the weak and the lost,
God who hears earth’s cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For the new life striving to be born,
God who hears earth's cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For those who lead and carry heavy burdens,
God who hears earth's cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For your church, that she might be faithful,
God who hears earth's cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

For ourselves, that we may be the women and men you create us to be,
God who hears earth's cry, ***Feed us or we die.***

HYMN R&S 449 ***I hunger and I thirst***

Blessing

May we lie down this night in peace, and rise up to life renewed. May night spread over us a shelter of peace, of quiet and calm, the blessing of rest. There will come a time when morning will bring no word of war or famine or anguish; there will come a day of happiness, of contentment and peace. Praised be the source of joy within us, for the night and its rest, for the promise of peace. Amen.

[*Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*. 1995. Central Conference of American Rabbis.]

Seeking a homeland

Call to Worship

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Let us worship God whose hand guides us, whose bread feeds us and whose love forms us.
We sing: **Guide me O thou great Jehovah**

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Generous God, by whose hand we are fed, we praise and bless you for meeting us at every point of need. With you as our shepherd, we shall not want. The abundance of the earth testifies to your bounty; the glory of creation sings of your beauty. We do indeed have all that we need. Yet we hoard earth's abundance and mar earth's beauty in a futile attempt to master the creation and ensure our security. Remind us that we are not gods and restore us to right relationship with you, the earth, our neighbours and ourselves.

Delivering God, by whose strength we are healed, we praise and bless you for the self-giving by which Jesus was sent to walk amongst us. His way revealed to be our salvation, we seek to walk it with humility and grace. We are indeed the children of the living God. Yet we wallow in our wounds, discount our salvation, and allow distractions and temptations to lead us astray from the way that gives us life. Remind us that we are freed and restore us to right paths for your name's sake.

Sustaining God, by whose presence we are saved, we praise and bless you for the power of the Holy Spirit who prays within us when we have forgotten how and who we are. Her breath is our peace. Her promise, our hope. We are indeed blessed and beloved. Yet we squander our inheritance, diminish our humanity and dismiss our potential, preferring the false powers of status and wealth to the treasure of integrity and surrendered living. Remind us that your love will not let us go and restore us to completion of joy.

In the silence of this moment, we open ourselves to your fullness.

Silence

Assurance of Grace: Hear the good news which gives us life. When we turn towards God, we are met in mercy and lifted in love. In Christ, we are a new creation. We are forgiven, we are freed. Thanks be to the living God! Amen.

Scripture readings

Deuteronomy 34:1, 4-7 **Read from the podium – high up**

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12, 23-32, 13-16 **Readers from around the room**

Reader 1: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Reader 2: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

Reader 3: By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

Reader 4: By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—

Reader 5: All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Luke 9:51-62

HYMN

Sustenance for the journey

Interspersed with a verse of

Read from the communion table

We are people on a journey

Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Reader 1

Vs 1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you; alleluia, alleluia: *Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, allelu, alleluia.*

Reader 2

Vs 2 Ask, and it shall be given unto you, seek, and ye shall find; knock and the door shall be opened unto you; alleluia, alleluia:

Reader 3

Vs 3 We shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, alleluia, alleluia:

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer including prayers for persecuted churches

Prayer for all who seek home

God of all humanity

When your people were enslaved and displaced,
You led them to a land that they could call home;
When your people were in exile;
Your promise was that one day,
They would live in streets of play and laughter.
When your disciples were afraid and uncertain,
You spoke of a Father's House
With mansions and places prepared.

We pray today for all those who have no place to call home,
Hearing the heart-cry of your word
For those who are without refuge.
Where shelter is ours to offer,
Grant us the will and resolve to reflect the generosity of our Creator.
May our cry for justice never falter.
May the idols of self-interest and economic gain
Never deflect us from the ways of your Kingdom.
Through Christ our Lord.

And while Home is our great longing,
We pray that the desire to be safe
in our homes and in our nations
will not lead us into the temptation
of letting FEAR dominate our lives.
In the face of acts of terrorism and religious extremism,
enliven our commitment to walk the way of peace.

Finally we pray for the church around the world, for those Christians who are persecuted for the faith and for those in affluent countries who have lost confidence in the gospel message. Strengthen our faith and embolden our witness, so that neither persecution nor complacency will diminish the power of the good news. We offer to you the decisions we have made these three days, asking that you will prosper the work which serves your

purposes, redirect energy that is dispersed on inessentials, and guide and enable us all to love and serve as you and you alone desire.

We thank you and we bless you for your love which gives us life. As we prepare to return home, grant us travelling mercies and give us words and attitudes which will allow the experiences we have had here to nourish and empower others. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray together, Our Father

Sung Communion Table Prayer: The Winter Name of God

[Note: the "Winter Name of God" evokes those times when God feels absent, times of hardship and longing.]

HYMN My life flows on in endless song

Blessing and Dismissal

Go forth with a song in your heart and a spring in your step.

God is and because God is, we are.

And the blessing of God our Maker, Christ our Saviour and the Spirit our Breath
be upon us as we go forth to bless the world. Amen.

Retiring offering for Refugee work