

LCRF Lenten Reflections 2020



The London Churches Refugee Fund offers these prayers and reflections for the five Sundays in Lent, inviting you to use them for church services, fellowship and Lent house groups or personal prayers and devotions.

Each of the five parts relates to the lectionary readings for the five Sundays in Lent and includes a real-life case study of the experience of refugees & asylum seekers in London. You could:

- use the reflections as a meditative reading at the start of a service, perhaps lighting a candle
- include the prayers in your intercessions
- share the case studies with your fellowship for discussion in groups or
- just spend a few minutes of quietness reflecting personally on the human stories told here.

This document may be printed (*hint*: from Adobe Acrobat Reader, set print options to double-sided and select “Booklet” to print as a folded A5), copied and used freely for non-commercial purposes but please include an attribution to LCRF. We invite you to make a donation to the work of the charity, which you can do online or by post: see our website www.help4refugees.co.uk/donate for full details.

The London Churches Refugee Hardship Fund makes small grants to front-line church & community projects across London. The grants are mainly used to provide Travelcards, phonecards, hygiene and baby packs or other essentials to destitute refugees and asylum seekers. You can read more about our work, and how you can support it, at www.help4refugees.co.uk

Week 1: seeking refuge

Lectionary Reading: Psalm 32

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance (verse 7 – NRSV).

Ms Z, aged 20, from Somalia was trafficked in the UK as an unaccompanied minor aged 16 and kept in isolation for many years. She was raped and forced into prostitution by her agents, and advised not to try to escape otherwise her family back home would be in trouble. She was fearful, and suffering in silence, until one day she managed to run away. She made an application for asylum, but when that was refused she lost her accommodation and financial support. When she came to the African Refugee Community (ARC) she was homeless, disoriented and suffering from severe depression.

ARC supported her financially with food vouchers, transport costs, hygiene packs and phone cards. She also received advocacy, and is now in contact with a GP, mental health counsellor and a solicitor to help with her Fresh Claim application. She now feels happy when she comes to the ARC office to collect her hardship payment, and her mental, social and physical well-being is improving gradually because of the support she receives.

(2018)

How would we cope if trafficked far away from our family and friends, our homeland? A teenager raped and forced into prostitution for years, ashamed, degraded, always afraid. No-one to turn to. Utter desperation. Even when she escaped from her captors, the authorities she turned to for protection let her down. But she has found support, kindness and comfort with people who respect her, treat her as a human being, respond to her needs.

Jesus always respected the dignity of every individual he met, however much they were might be condemned or rejected by society. The lives of the woman caught in adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, are all transformed by their encounter with Jesus.

Robina Rafferty, LCRF Trustee.



Lord Jesus Christ, who came to bring good news to the poor, give us the courage to reach out to those who are neglected and abandoned, to see you in everyone we meet, and to play our part in creating your Kingdom of love and justice.

Amen

Week 2: blessed

Lectionary Reading: Genesis 12, 1-4a

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you... I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (verses 1, 3 – NRSV)

Papa T, in his seventies, approached the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) because he was hungry and had no money after his original asylum application had been refused. The first time he came it felt like the "Fete de Versailles" as there was more food for everyone than he had seen for a long time.

JRS helped him to access a solicitor, and therapeutic support from Freedom from Torture, and he was granted leave to remain. He has greatly appreciated winter clothing and toiletry packs, and will now count on JRS's help to get some basic items for the accommodation he has been given. Formerly a mayor and senior civil servant in his country, he now volunteers at another refugee centre, and is continuing to improve his English and be of service to others.

(2017)

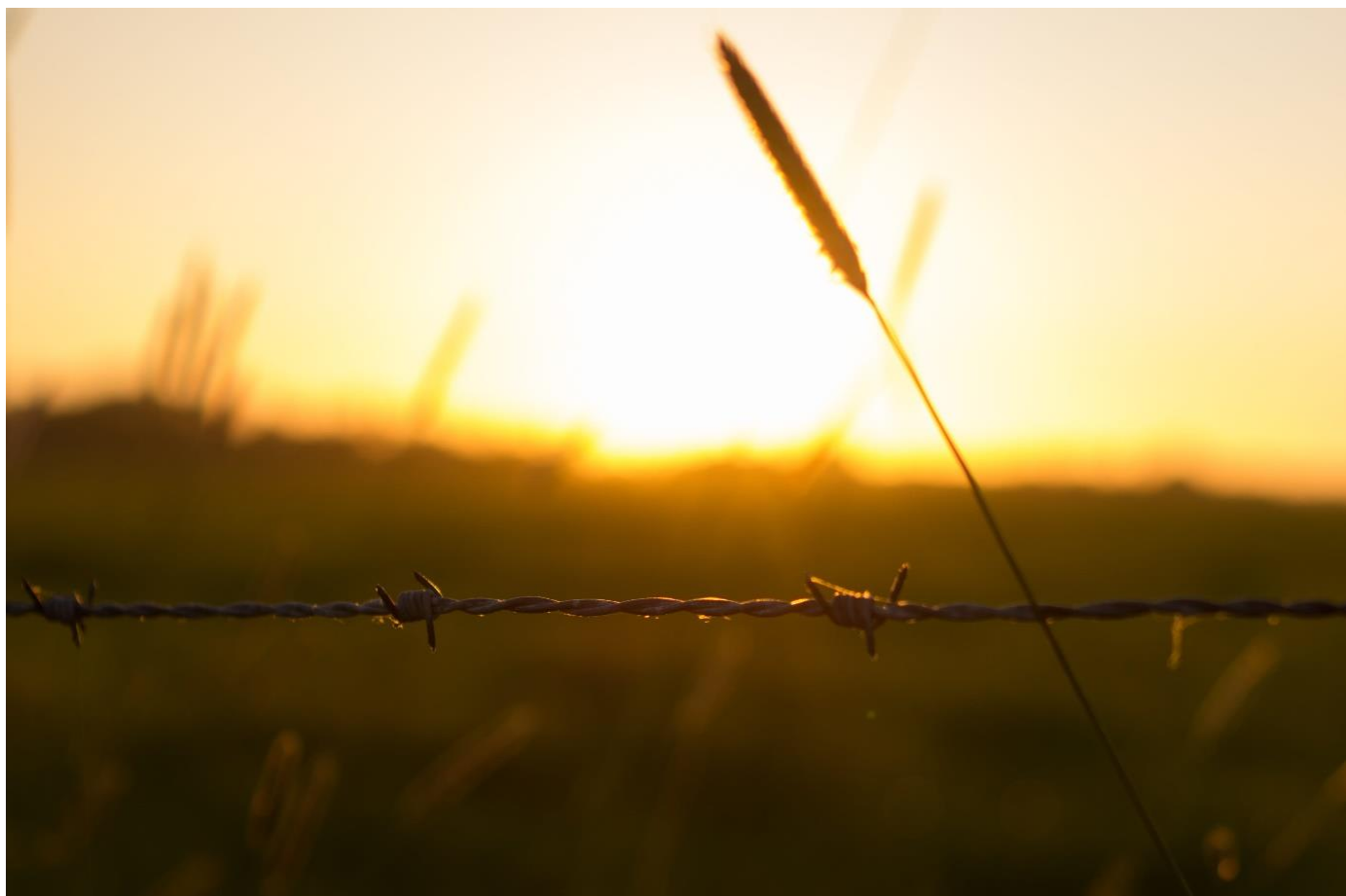
Here is Abraham, grandfather of all Jews, Christians and Muslims, migrating at the age of 75. He had a long and eventful journey, a long period of settling in a new country, a long long wait for the child God had promised.

And generation after generation across the world have been blessed in him, coming to knowing God and God's kindness and imbibing Abrahamic values of honesty, fair dealing and hospitality.

And here is Papa T, a refugee in his seventies, a victim of trauma, having to wait a long time to be accepted in his new country; at last able to use his wisdom and skills to make a contribution.

We are blessed in him, seeing in him an example of courage, resilience and grace that calls out our own better qualities.

Revd Maggie Hindley, LCRF Trustee



**God who longs to bless us all,
Bless us through the privilege of welcoming the stranger
and of coming to value the gifts they may bring.
Bless us in our little acts of service and of giving.
And may all the families of the earth be blessed.
Amen.**

Week 3: meeting the foreigner

Lectionary Reading: John 4, 5-42

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans) (verse 9 – NRSV)

Since A, from East Africa, first came to Akwaaba (Ak), he has been a highly valued member of the volunteer team. As one of Ak's kitchen supervisors, A, who has extensive experience of chef work, regularly manages a small team of volunteers, preparing a meal for 100-150 people every Sunday.

Through Akwaaba, A recently completed a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate and participated in the Olive Course, a programme at the University of East London which prepares asylum seekers for higher education in the UK. Every week, when he finishes his volunteer shift, A attends Ak's advanced level English course. He is ambitious and hopes to attend university in the UK when his asylum application is resolved.

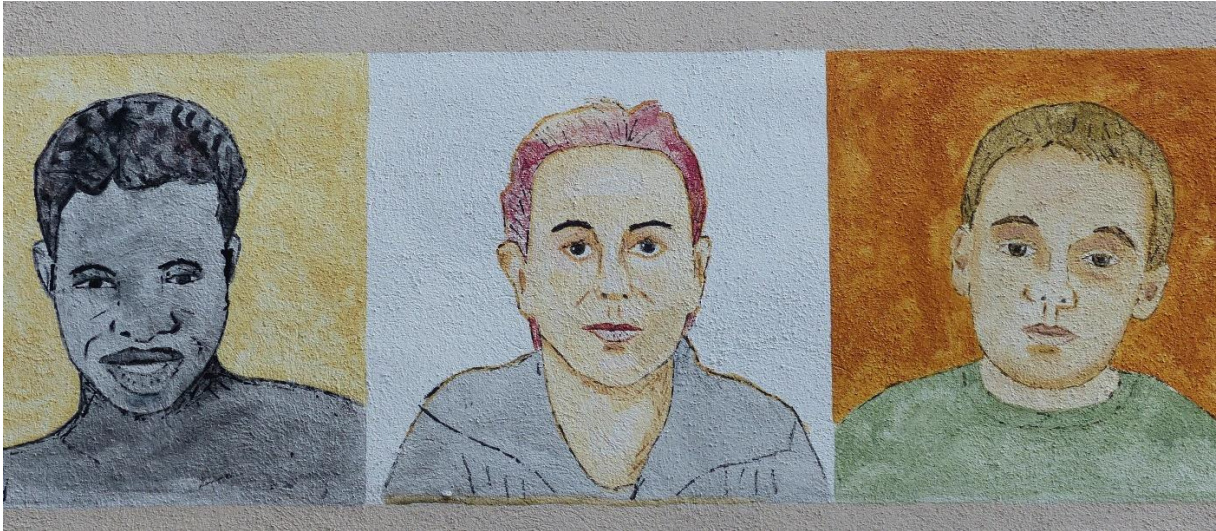
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K was imprisoned and tortured because of the opposition songs he wrote to protest against corruption in his country. When he came to Room to Heal (RtH) he was destitute, had no legal representation and had lost all hope in change. Through casework support he obtained legal representation, evidence for his case, and hosting when he was homeless. Through participation in RtH's therapeutic groups he started to write and play music again. After RtH's attendance in court he won his refugee status and has embarked on a Masters in Music. He is also mentoring newer members of RtH.

(2019)

Just imagine being shunned. No one will speak to you or walk near you. People making comments, laughing or pulling themselves away so as not to make contact. Stares that penetrate, whispering seeping into your being, continuing the hurt residing within. What does that do to you as a person, to how you see yourself and how you think others see you?

Jesus sought out those most persecuted; those shunned and ostracised, extending a hand of understanding, of friendship and love to the lonely and the afraid – regardless of whether they were ‘accepted’. Jesus looked at the person, the child of God. He goes across the divide. He did not concern himself with the definitions and conventions of his society: that as a Samaritan she was one of a minority, that a man should not approach a woman, that Jewish people should never speak to Samaritans. Jesus saw the individual.



Just imagine A and K and everything they have been through and imagine someone extending a hand of love. The pain and suffering experienced may never be forgotten but somehow, by initiating a conversation, by responding with respect and humanity, treating ‘foreigners’ as equals, transformation occurs.

Hope precious and beautiful blossoms when a hand of welcome and love is offered. Jesus is that hope we feel within the brokenness of how the ‘other’ is treated. Jesus’ death and resurrection transforms us through the lens of love where, no matter who we are, no difference is visible.

Revd Roxane Liddell, LCRF Trustee

Ever loving God,

As we walk through Lent, make our hearts more receptive to those whose journeys may be in the wilderness and equip us to be instruments of your love.

Amen

Week 4: friend or foe?

Lectionary Reading: 1 Samuel 16, 1-13

Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"

(verse 4 – NRSV)

NA came to a Praxis Outreach session at Bromley by Bow Centre; she was self-harming and had twice attempted suicide. She originally came to the UK on a student visa when she was 18 but was forced to marry a man with severe mental health problems. She left him, but was forced to marry again, this time suffering abuse and rape. She was disowned by her family for not staying in either of these marriages, and her father wrote to her threatening to kill her if she ever returned to Bangladesh.

The Praxis adviser found her a high-quality solicitor who has agreed to put in an asylum application for her. With funding from LCRF, Praxis were also able to provide her with lunch and expenses to travel to her solicitor's appointment. The funding was essential to contributing to her access to justice and also her sense of feeling supported at a traumatic point in her life.

(2018)

Warfare, torture or threats of violence have been the lived experience of those forced to flee their homelands as refugees. To be able to live your life free of violence doesn't sound a lot to ask. And yet so many encounter further dangers and brutalities during their hazardous journeys and even after they reach the UK. Safety at last? Not for those living in destitution on our streets or sleeping on night buses, or those trapped in abusive situations.

How strange, then, that we who enjoy relative peace may be afraid of the stranger at our gate, just as the elders of Bethlehem were of Samuel. Fear of being 'swamped', of seeing our culture eroded, or of becoming the victims of criminal, 'illegal' migrants – such fears are never far away, whether in the headlines on tabloid newspapers or at the bar of our local pub.



“Do you come peaceably?” What a question to ask, and yet perhaps no harsher than the interrogations of immigration officers trained and encouraged to disbelieve the stories that they are told. “Show me the evidence” might be today’s equivalent.

Do ramparts and locked doors guarantee peace and safety, or create a climate of hostility and resentment?

Martin Ashford, LCRF Trustee

Heavenly Father, help us to respond with generosity of heart to the stranger at our gate. Help us too to realise that the fears we may have are nothing compared to the terror that so many refugees have faced; and to respond to the deep need for peace of those who seek shelter among us.

Amen

Week 5: restored to life

Lectionary Reading: John 11, 1-45

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

(verse 44 – NRSV)

Ms E first came to the Black Women's Rape Action Project (BWRAP) self-help sessions after being encouraged by a friend. She was living scared of the Home Office and didn't understand the refusal letter she had been sent. Having fled Malawi in fear of her family who had abused her when they found she was having a relationship with another woman, she was terrified of being returned and could not believe she has been rejected. She was traumatised, couldn't sleep, and didn't have the confidence to speak for many months. As she gradually opened up, BWRAP were able to give her practical support and advice.

In December 2017 Ms E announced that she had won her case and celebrated by singing triumphantly, backed up joyfully by her fellow members of the self-help group. She detailed how the self-help guide and sessions on writing a case summary and using the Gender Guidelines in an asylum claim were invaluable to her understanding, and preparing her case, and in convincing the judge to grant her asylum.

At her hearing, more than 25 people crammed into court, and the judge was clearly impressed by her witnesses and supporters, many of whom were women from the self-help sessions. Keen for other women to learn their rights and how to stay on top of their own cases, she wanted her victory recorded and made available to inspire other women.

(2019)

How many of us can identify with Ms E's situation? "Not me", you might say, "I'm not a Refugee living in the darkness of a refused asylum application."

But if we are honest we might come to admit that, like Lazarus imprisoned in limbo between this world and the next, many of us know all too well at least something of what Ms E has experienced, trapped in what seems to be a dark and hopeless situation, living anxiously between hope and despair. We might have been waiting

for the results of a health scare test, living with a chronic or terminal illness, in despair about our financial, family or work situation, worried about loneliness or old age, terrified by the possible environmental fate of our planet... Don't we too need to be called to liberty, life and light by Jesus' voice, setting us free?

Lazarus was still going to have to face death one day; Ms E's troubles will be far from over as she faces successive challenges both legal and personal; and we may live all our lives in the shadow of the cross. But the difference now is that WE, like Ms E, have heard the voice of Jesus say: "Unbind my friend and let her go."

It began to get better for Ms E when she was able to share her despair and her fears with friends, who together accompanied and helped her in and through the darkness, until morning came. The greatest friend we have is Jesus, and His brothers and sisters with whom we worship and share fellowship and prayer.



Revd Chris Brice, LCRF Chair

Lord Jesus Christ, who unbound Lazarus and set him free from death, please help me, and all those who are trapped in the inner darkness of fear and anxiety, to have the courage to share our needs with ourselves, with you and with our brothers and sisters in Christ that we too might be freed to live in the light with courage and hope.

Amen



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