

## Second Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

**Sunday 22 June 2025**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Sabine Chalmers and Esther Rowan Moodie, Co-ordinators for The Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees ('SFAR'), along with Prof Alison Phipps, Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies and UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts and Rev David Nicolson, minister at Erskine Parish Church, for their thoughts on the Second Sunday after Pentecost.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

Today is Sanctuary Sunday (also called Refugee Sunday), a day when churches around the world remember and pray for refugees and people displaced from their homes. Most of us are no strangers to this topic, as we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of people flee for their lives over the last decade. And some of us are very closely acquainted with this topic, as we have welcomed people from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Sudan and many more nationalities in our communities and churches.

We are delighted that two people who have been on this journey of welcome have contributed to this resource. We are grateful to Rev David Nicolson, minister of Erskine Parish Church who, together with other churches in his community welcomed dozens of people seeking asylum through practical and pastoral support, friendship, prayer and love when a hotel hosting people seeking asylum opened in their local area two years ago. We are also grateful to Professor Alison Phipps, Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies and UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts for sharing her reflections with us. She is a member of the Iona Community and has walked with sanctuary seekers most of her life. To learn more about Alison and her amazing work, see this [interview with the Church Times](#), and this article on [10 things that changed her life](#).

On Sanctuary Sunday we look to the Scriptures and reflect on how our faith calls us to respond to the needs of refugees, both around the world and those living amongst us. The Bible is full of stories of people on the move. Joseph offered his father and brothers sanctuary in Egypt when their homeland was ravaged by famine, then 400 years later, Moses led that same people out of Egypt to freedom and a new land. Ruth left her home as a penniless widow and worked as a migrant labourer in Bethlehem. And of course, Mary and Joseph fled the violent persecution of Herod, seeking asylum once more in Egypt. Throughout all these stories, we see a God who has a loving concern for the exiled and the stranger.

In today's readings, we encounter Elijah fleeing for his life in fear of Jezebel, who threatened to kill him after God's judgement on Baal's prophets (1 Kings 19:2). We encounter a Psalmist whose 'tears have been [their] food day and night' (Psalm 42) – a sentiment that, no doubt, Elijah and many people fleeing for their lives could have penned as their own words. We also receive a life-giving reminder from the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3 that our position before God has nothing to do with our nationality, ethnicity, sex, social standing or tradition. "Our acceptance as children of God derives from our baptism in Christ: a free choice open to all" (F Kendall).

We're all on a journey. A journey through life, living one day at a time. A journey away from the darkness we experience, towards something better. A journey in the darkness, clinging to God with the little strength we have. A joyous journey, celebrating new life, accomplishments and victories. A journey alone; a journey with others. A journey with God, a journey away from God, a journey towards God.

This Sunday, we want to invite you to take a deeper dive into the journey of people who have arrived in Scotland as sanctuary seekers; who have been on their own journeys of hardship, persecution, loss, destruction of their homes, livelihoods and whole lives. Their journeys will have, without a doubt, resonated with words we find in today's scriptures.

Visit our [Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees website](#) for the latest resources that you can include in and use to shape your Sanctuary Sunday services. You will find video testimonies of people seeking sanctuary in Scotland, prayers written by those displaced, reflections and much more!

'God with us' is a Christian worship resource on the theme of refugees, migration and sanctuary. You can download your copy [here](#).

*Sabine Chalmers*

*Co-ordinator, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees*

## **1 Kings 19:1-15a**

In the reading from Kings, for Sanctuary Sunday, we find a difficult passage about a person – Elijah – who has, in modern legal terms, a well-founded fear of persecution. He has been most directly threatened by the ruler, Queen Jezebel, with execution by the sword, so is facing a death penalty, and even as he feels his strength is insufficient, he is given food which saves him from the death he has come to crave. Each time, he is strengthened by well-meaning angels – those who leave warm bread, and jars of water to give him just enough, perhaps a cruel amount, to reach the safety of a cave.

Some would find themselves in a place of gratitude and sanctuary for themselves as individuals at this moment, being able to rebuild their lives from this place in the wilderness and on the edge, perhaps waiting for people who may give safe passage onwards. But this is not the destiny awaiting a figure like Elijah, who, as a prophet, must speak, and speak out. His prophetic speech is clearly sufficient in its effects, to bring structural change in the heart of political and symbolic power. So, whilst others may find sanctuary in the desert, with warm bread and water from angels, or in the cave, watching as environmental devastation

wrecks the sanctuary, it causes Elijah to flee into his cloak and to come out from what remains of the cave to hear a small whisper. This whisper – the opposite of a threat or of thunder – telling him not to flee, not to seek sanctuary, but to go back to the dangerous fleshpots of power and violence and to change the symbolic structures of the rulers of the land, by anointing a new King.

The work of changing the structures of obedience, of ceasing to flee, of returning to rebuilding and of making a world safe – not just for the individual but for all, is a work of extraordinary obedience. It is asked of the faint-hearted, of Elijah in his most weakened and embattled state.

*Prof Alison Phipps*

## [Psalm 42](#)

It's a dark and scary world out there. It's normal for folks in our culture to feel surrounded by threat. We seem to be living in a collective 'bad news' cycle, that has spanned a couple of decades now, between historic financial crises once-in-a-generation pathogen outbreaks, not to mention the burgeoning avalanche of mental health issues. Our technological leaps mean many of us cannot escape the reminders of how bad things are. It can be hard to separate the genuine threats to our well-being, which are external, from the despair and even hopelessness that threatens to sabotage us from within.

Was it ever so? In this dark and scary world, when speaking to folks outside the church, I'm often asked what it is about faith, and specifically the Bible, that can still be considered useful? Psalm 42 would be a succinct answer. The timeless experience of having “breakers and billows” (v7) of depression and despair wash over us, is there. The existential anguish of wondering if our pain means that God has abandoned us, or perhaps punishing us – even indifferent to us.

Psalm 42, in opening Book II of the psalter, has a subtle movement in addressing 'God' more than 'Yahweh' as in Book I. We feel the swirl of doubt, distance, pain, and longing for the connection and closeness. The psalm strikes somewhere between lament and plea. It is important to pause and validate this as part of being a frail human in a confusing world. We are limited and often broken by life. But not fully and finally. The best antidote to any depression is to reckon with the possibility it will not always be so. The psalmist sees a shaft of light, from the future deliverance of God, streaming through the smallest gap in his despair:

“Why, my soul, are you so dejected?  
Why are you in such turmoil?  
Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.” (v5)

*Rev David Nicolson*

### **Galatians 3:23-29**

It seems like a distant memory, but there was a time when *The West Wing* represented something aspirational for millions of viewers when they thought about the leader of the free world. Jed Bartlett was, indeed, human and flawed, but also sincere, industrious, and importantly, a man of deep personal faith. I remember being moved to tears during the ‘Shibboleth’ episode. The US Executive was under pressure over whether to recognise and grant asylum to a group of Chinese immigrants who had emerged via a container ship on the West Coast, claiming to seek religious asylum.

The climax was a moving scene in the Oval Office, where President Bartlett decided to question an asylum seeker, one-on-one. To his amazement, in searching for a suitable word to describe the nature of his faith, Mr. Wei used the exact word "Shibboleth," that instantly demonstrated his deep engagement with the stories of faith he'd become a part of.

I never imagined I'd be in a similar position, having a conversation with someone from a faraway country, feeling religious persecution, seeking to convince me of their possession of faith, and demonstrate some kind of ‘Shibboleth’ that would validate their claim. But as I chatted with my new friends who had come to our little suburban town, due to being housed in a nearby hotel by the Home Office, that's where I found myself.

One of my friends, I'll call her Azadeh, gave me that ‘Shibboleth’ moment I'll never forget. In trying to decide whether to baptise her, I chatted through her understanding of some basic creedal points, and particularly the meaning of baptism. I asked if it mattered how the nature of baptism occurred (immersion, sprinkling, etc.). She said in her best English, "It doesn't matter if it is only one tiny drop, I know it will have the power of God and show that my sins are washed away." Just as when I watched the episode of *The West Wing*, I welled up. Azadeh had come from a country and culture where Christ was outlawed, and the price for following Him couldn't be higher. And through all that, she was teaching me about the power and reality behind these words from the apostle Paul:

“So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:26, CSB)

*Rev David Nicolson*

See page 32 in our resource for a further reflection on Galatians 3:23-

29. ([https://www.sfar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/God-With-Us-Booklet\\_Final-compressed.pdf](https://www.sfar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/God-With-Us-Booklet_Final-compressed.pdf))

### **Luke 8:26-39**

In the gospel reading for Sanctuary Sunday, we find the figure of Legion – a man made of many who suddenly, miraculously, morphs into a plague of pigs, hurtling off a cliff. The fantasies which can occur when people are, as we are told in the text, afraid, are indeed – ‘legion’ – as to what might befall them or others. In this text, as in so many narratives of hostility to people seeking sanctuary, we find animal imagery – herds, hoards, swarms – a fear of a mass overwhelming the story, drowning out the acts of healing, filling the people with such fear, they banish the healer and ‘deport’ Jesus from their midst.

Legion lost the torment that had plagued him, through simply hearing his name spoken by Jesus – not, as we can imagine, a constant deluge of abuse and choice language from those living in fear of him and all he represented to their fantasies of fear. He became gentle, and respectable in visage and apparel in the presence of one who called him by his name, cutting through the layers of accustomed abuse. So, it is no surprise that he wishes, when Jesus is ‘deported’ – required to leave Gerasenes across the Sea of Galilee – that Legion would want to stay close to the one who called him by name. But in this narrative, Jesus does not offer any more sanctuary than that which comes with hearing your name, for once restoration of life has occurred, it is time to get to work; as the poet Mary Oliver says – to pay attention, be astonished, and then to tell about it. This ‘telling’ of course, is prophetic now – a story of change and possibility, of overcoming fear, and breaking the chains which demonisation and abuse will seek to shackle forever. In telling about it, Legion will be further healed, the reality embedded not just into his one life, but into the lives of many, of legions.

*Prof Alison Phipps*

### **Sermon ideas**



As you prepare your sermon this Sanctuary Sunday, we would encourage to use this as an opportunity to weave in the experiences of refugees and people seeking sanctuary into your preaching. On themed Sundays like these, there can be a worry about imposing ideas onto the text. However, as our contributors have well demonstrated, these passages resonate deeply with the refugee experience. Their themes of despair and hope, exclusion and belonging, fear and renewal, reflect the lived reality of millions who have been forced from their homes and yet hold on to the hope of a new beginning.

Our challenge as we preach through these passages is to **see, listen, and act.**

### **See the reality of displacement**

We must be willing to **see** the impact of forced displacement in our world. In the story of the Prophet Elijah, we read of a man who faced persecution at the hands of an oppressive regime and was forced on a dangerous journey into the wilderness. This is an experience familiar to the over 43 million people who have fled their countries to seek sanctuary. They are often forced to make perilous journeys through deserts, warzones and across treacherous seas, all to find safety.

At his lowest point, Elijah experienced a deep despair. “I have had enough, Lord” are the words of someone at the end of their endurance. His words echo the psalmist’s lament: “My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42:3). These are words of exhaustion and of deep despair.

On Sanctuary Sunday we are called to see this suffering, to acknowledge and not ignore the pain in our world. In the face of such an overwhelming problem, it can be tempting to look the other way, but these passages remind us of the importance of giving people space to name the challenges that face them and to lament.

### **Listen with an open heart**

We must also be prepared to **listen** with open hearts to the voices of people who have been displaced. The strange story of Jesus and Legion may not, at first, appear to resonate with a refugee narrative. Yet here is a man burdened by something he did not choose, that has robbed him of his name and identity. He is forced to live among the tombs on the very edge of society, feared and excluded.

Imagine being torn from the things that give you your sense of identity: your home, your family, your career, your language. The experience of seeking sanctuary can cause many people to lose their sense of self. People leave behind a world they know and then find



themselves on the margins of society, trapped in bureaucracies and made to feel like they are nothing more than a case number.

When confronted by the man possessed by Legion, Jesus listened to him. He did not turn away, or dismiss the man as too broken, too dangerous, or too different. Jesus' willingness to listen is the first step towards the man's healing and reintegration into his community.

We are called to listen to refugees, and not just to their narratives of seeking sanctuary, but their whole life stories. People are more than their immigration status; they have hopes, fears, joys and aspirations. True listening goes beyond sympathy in that it seeks to understand and celebrate a person's humanity in all its fullness.

### **Act for justice**

Seeing and listening are essential, but they must lead to **action**. Paul's declaration in Galatians is one of the most radical in Scripture: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus". This passage reminds us that faith calls us not just to welcome the stranger, but to reshape our communities so that there are no strangers, only friends and neighbours.

Many churches have responded to the needs of refugees in practical ways. They have started community meals, run clothing banks, hosted English classes. These services are vital, but our calling does not stop there. Just as God called Elijah beyond the wilderness into renewed purpose, and Jesus sent the man once possessed back into this community to share the Good News, we must walk alongside people as they rediscover their calling and place in community. True sanctuary is not just about offering a roof over people's heads, but about empowering people to find belonging, purpose and a future.

Baptism, one of the sacraments of our faith, symbolises new beginning, the chance at a new life that transcends human divisions. It is a reminder that in Christ, all things are made new and that we are called to be agents of that renewal in the world today.

May our sermons this Sunday not only name injustice but inspire us to action. May they fill us with hope in the restorative power of God's love and encourage us as we seek to build communities of sanctuary for all.

*Esther Rowan Moodie*

*Co-ordinator, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees*

## Prayers

### Opening prayer *(from God With Us)*

May God walk with refugees as God walked with Abraham.  
May Christ protect those who were forced out of their homeland  
as Christ experienced displacement since His birth.  
May the Holy Spirit lead and comfort those who are willing to lose everything,  
but keep the faith. Amen

### **Prayer of thanksgiving and confession** (written by Veronique who is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo.)

Heavenly Father,  
I bow my heart to You and pray.  
I give You thanks for all You have done.  
Thank You for being my refuge and my strength.  
Thank You for Your goodness in my life.  
When I wake each morning,  
I praise Your name.  
I give thanks that no matter what the circumstances,  
I can count on You to shelter me  
and to give me strength.  
Almighty God,  
merciful Father,  
I, a poor, miserable sinner,  
confess to You all my sins and iniquities,  
those known and unknown.  
I'm not perfect  
and I fall short every day of my life.  
Thank You for Your mercy.  
In Jesus name, Amen.

*The following prayers have been written by refugees and people seeking asylum who come from rich and diverse prayer traditions. They were collated and published by the Jesuit Refugee Service.*

### Call to worship

The Lord is knocking at the door of our hearts.

He wants to enjoy intimate fellowship with us.  
Oh Lord, help me to develop everlasting relationship with You.

I receive You in my heart today.  
Lord, I want to enjoy fellowship with You in the name of Jesus.  
Holy Spirit, help me to experience God's presence.

### **Prayers of gratitude / thanksgiving**

I will keep trusting and believing in God  
and I will keep holding on to God's promises  
knowing that it shall be well with my soul.

I refuse to be discouraged.  
I receive spiritual encouragement to go forward.  
Lord, everywhere I go, I will not be alone  
because You are always with me.  
I declare I am courageous,  
no matter what I see or hear,  
I will not give up, in Jesus' name.

Lord, remind us of the precious and constant thoughts You have for us,  
entrusting our identity and our self-confidence in You,  
rather than in ourselves, our circumstances, or the culture that we live in.  
Thank You for Your word and unending love for us.  
In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Father God, help us to value life as much as You do,  
and to be good stewards of not only the bodies You have crafted for us,  
but the short time here on earth You have given us to do Your will and glorify You.  
Lord Jesus, You break down the walls that divide us;  
walls of hostility that blind us to one another.  
You died that we may be one.  
Thank You for Your great and merciful love,  
we trust You.

### **Prayers for others / intercessions**

We pray that God will increase our faith  
and make us stronger in Him,  
that nothing in this world will separate us from the love of God,

which is in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

I pray for all those going through tough situations,  
that God will intervene and visit them;  
that they will experience divine encounter  
and their burdens be lifted off their shoulder,  
as they cry to God for help, just as in the time of Jabez.

We pray that God will be close to all who are persecuted  
because they believe in the Lord.  
May God console those who are suffering  
and living in fear of religious persecution.

Lord Jesus, be with the unjustly accused and illegally detained.  
Give them courage to face the beatings,  
patience to bear the lies,  
and hope to see beyond the bars and the barbed wire.

I pray for all nations at war.  
May God give us peace.  
Help the war in Russia and Ukraine to be over quickly.  
We don't want to be suffering or panicking.  
God, release peace into the world.

I pray for leaders in government and positions of authority,  
for religious leaders all over the world,  
and for heads of families.  
I pray that they may all have strength and peace.  
I pray for those waiting for decisions from the Home Office on their asylum cases,  
that they can have peace, knowing the Lord is at their side.  
I pray that the Lord will give consolation  
and make the waiting time feel shorter.

I pray that the Lord in infinite mercy,  
may look after those who cannot afford food and are reliant on food banks.  
I pray that God meets the need of all creation.

**Blessing** *(from God With Us)*  
May God bless us,

our God, who called the world into being,  
who breathed us into life,  
who provides us with new strength.  
May God bless us,  
our God, whose love does not know borders nor walls,  
whose justice will come.  
Our God, who casts down the mighty from their thrones  
and lifts up the lowly.  
May God bless us,  
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen

**Blessing** (*from Pray Now: Stories of Encounter*)

May God bless us with encounters  
that turn strangers into neighbours,  
that turn fear into friendships,  
that turn hatred into hospitality,  
that turn pain into peace. Amen

More prayers can be found in the [God With Us](#) resource.

## Musical suggestions

*God Welcomes All* (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music version and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources, including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 25 – “The God of Sarah praise” – verse 3 is appropriate in relation to the oppressed
- GWA 42 – “Here we are together” – a catchy song, stressing God’s welcome for all
- GWA 47 – “Come, all you wounded and weary” – relates well with the main themes for this Sunday
- GWA 51 – “Kyrie eleison” – a moving plea for mercy (in English and Arabic)
- GWA 101 – “There is no child so small” – although strictly a Christmas song, the verses connect closely with the theme of inclusivity
- GWA 209 – “We are called to welcome strangers” – connects with our overall theme
- GWA 216 – “Build a longer table, not a higher wall” – again, this song fits perfectly with this Sunday’s overall theme

The following selection from CH4 all fittingly correlate with this Sunday’s themes:

- CH4 9 – Psalm 16
- CH4 168 – "God weeps at love withheld"
- CH4 198 – "Let us build a house where love can dwell"
- CH4 253 – "Inspired by love and anger"
- CH4 259 – "Beauty for brokenness"
- CH4 360 – "Jesus Christ is waiting"
- CH4 485 – "Dear Lord and Father of mankind" (verse 6)
- CH4 543 – "Longing for light, we wait in darkness"
- CH4 544 – "When I needed a neighbour were you there?"
- CH4 550 – "As the deer pants for the water"

- CH4 606 – "Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders"
- CH4 694 – "Brother, sister, let me serve you"
- CH4 706 – "For the healing of the nations" (alternative tunes: Westminster Abbey, Cwm Rhondda)
- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout the Pentecost season can be found on the Church of Scotland website (<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/pentecost>)

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.



The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?  
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?  
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?  
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

*God Welcomes All* can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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