

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost and Sanctuary Sunday – 25 June 2023

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank the Sanctuary Sunday writing group for their thoughts on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost and Sanctuary Sunday.

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.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the [Sanctuary First website](#).

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

In Genesis (16 and 21:8-21) we read the story of Hagar, Sarah's slave. At first, she does not seem like anyone to take particular note of, especially in contrast to the big promise of a son to Sarah and Abraham. Hagar is a foreigner from Egypt, mistreated by Sarah, fleeing into the wilderness, returning only to be driven away again by her masters. Her time in the wilderness is marked by despair, sorrow and fear of death. But there is one who sees her; one who provides safety, protection and care – sanctuary, in the hardest of places. Both times that Hagar is displaced it is God who seeks her out, cares for her and restores her. In response, Hagar calls God '*El Roi*' – 'the God who sees me'. This is a God who knows her pain deeply and does not leave her alone in it, but instead offers her a safe place, a promise, and sanctuary from her hardship.

Hagar's story will be familiar to many people fleeing their homes and seeking sanctuary in Scotland today. Disowned, dehumanised, forced away, scared, searching and hoping, often with children in tow. My biggest wish for people arriving at our shores is that they too can say: "God sees me. God knows my pain, is providing for my needs, and is offering me a place of sanctuary."

As we mark Sanctuary Sunday today, we want to consider the scriptures and ask how we can be the hands and feet of God and offer sanctuary to refugees and asylum seekers in our midst. How can we embrace the joys and talents that sit alongside their pain and loneliness? Sanctuary Sunday is a special Sunday set aside to pray for the stranger in our midst and say to the refugee and asylum seeker: "We see you, and there is a God who sees you too".

Congregations across Scotland have welcomed people from all over the world who are seeking asylum, as well as displaced people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Syria. There are more displaced people in the world today than at any other point in history and the Bible is clear in its expression of God's loving concern for the stranger and refugee. Let us draw alongside the stranger in our midst and offer up our prayers to Jesus for their safety, protection and integration in our communities. Let us also be ready to be transformed ourselves as we seek God in prayer and encounter God in stories of the Bible and in those seeking safety in our midst.

The contributions to this material have all been written by people who have personal, lived experience of having to flee their home country and finding refuge in Scotland; or with lived experience of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers in their congregations and communities.

We are delighted to hear from Tatiana, who arrived from Ukraine in May 2022 after fleeing her home in Odessa. She found a wonderful Christian family to stay with and a church family she can call home. As she reflects on Genesis 21 and Psalm 86 she beautifully weaves in her own experiences of leaving her country and finding safety in Scotland.

We are also thankful to Rev Dr John Carswell, Minister at Cadzow Parish Church, who expounds the two New Testament passages. John has a rich experience of regularly visiting and ministering to people in Dungavel, the only immigration detention centre in Scotland. In the Additional Material section he shares two moving encounters he had in the detention centre that you are welcome to read and share as part of your services.

The sermon notes have been collated by David Moodie, including reflections from Rev Dr Carswell. David is Churches Support Officer at Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees and Parish Assistant at Granton Parish Church.

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. There 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 new Christian worship resource on the theme of refugees, migration and sanctuary. You can download your copy [here](#) or request free printed copied [here](#).

[Genesis 21:8-21](#)

I am from Odessa, Ukraine. I moved to Edinburgh in May 2022 due to the war in my country. My son and daughter-in-law remained in Ukraine, as well as some of my friends. In Edinburgh, God gave me a wonderful family that took me in, as well as a wonderful church called Bellevue Chapel! I am very grateful to the Lord for His support and hope!

Imagine a desert. Wherever you look, all you can see is sand everywhere. There are no trees or any other vegetation, except for dry bushes. The sun burns everything that tries to grow, and you have a long road ahead through this parched land. There is nothing suitable to shelter you from the heat, there is not a single source of water along the road, only what you have taken with you. You are alone; it's just you and a boy – the son you are responsible for. There is not a single other person around who could offer you help. You wander in a direction unknown to you, no destination, not knowing where to turn, just wandering, hoping for safety. The situation is dire. What could be worse than this?

Many Ukrainians have found themselves in this situation during the war. You're running from danger, but you don't know where to run to. In your hands is a single suitcase, which now holds all your life's belongings. And sometimes you don't even have a suitcase – I did not have time to collect it. In your hands are the hands of your children. Who will help? Where to run to? Where can you expect help to come from? Everything around is new and unfamiliar. There are people around, but it is as if you are in a desert. Only you and your problems and no-one who could help!

In Genesis 21 we meet Hagar, the servant of Sarah, in a very similar situation. Hagar and her son Ishmael are displaced in the wilderness after being sent away by her masters. The sun is burning down, and the parched land that leads to nowhere is exhausting for the travellers. Eventually the provisions are empty, the last drop of water gone. What could be worse? Without water in the desert the chances of survival are zero. Hagar understands very well that her own strength is not enough to save her son and herself, and there they cannot count on help from others as there is not a soul around. What can a single woman do in such a situation?

Hagar makes the only decision she feels she can make in this situation. She leaves her son and goes a bowshot away so as not to see, and perhaps not hear, how he will die and she begins to cry. No one will hear her, but perhaps Hagar's cries will silence her son's cries. Incredibly though, there was one who sees and hears the voice of the boy. The angel of God calls to Hagar and says: "Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation" (vv17-18). And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. God sees their distress and restores both her and Ishmael's physical wellbeing as well as their dignity, safety and protection through the promise of a family.

This was Hagar's second meeting with God. The first happened when Hagar had to flee from her mistress into the wilderness after being mistreated (Genesis 16). The angel of the Lord seeks her out in love and care for her. Hagar has a very personal encounter with God and gives God the name 'El Roi', saying: "You are the God who sees me!"

God met Hagar twice in a desperate situation of displacement. God truly sees and understands her, and her worries and pain. God saves and restores her, and promises a hopeful future. This is the God who sees you too.

This is my God, the God in whom I believe! The God who knows all my difficulties and experiences, who does not leave me alone, but empathises and helps me! This is the God

who gives hope, and gives life! In the most difficult moments of my life, my Lord supported me and gave me hope! At the beginning of the war, I came across one expression that encouraged me: "When I die, I will be with the Lord! If I live, the Lord will be with me. Live or die, I belong to the Lord!"

Call the Lord into your life! And then you can say, "You are the God who sees me! You are the God who saves me!"

Tatiana Bondarenko

Psalm 86

Day of Sorrow

"In the day of my affliction, I cry out to You, because You will hear me." Psalm 86:7

These lines written in the Bible belong to David.

David was a man after God's own heart! Sincere, open, God-loving David! We first meet David when he was still a young man. He looked after his father's sheep, played musical instruments and sang. The young man David, who passionately loves God and believes in God, and without hesitation fought a giant and defeated him!

But now David writes about his grief and how hard life feels for him.

"Have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long.
Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you." (vv3-4)

We have all had bad days. Sometimes it's the bad weather creating your bad mood, maybe you didn't pass an exam or didn't cope with a task at work, maybe your dinner burned or your holiday is postponed. But what David describes is not quite the same. What David is experiencing seems to be deep grief, distress or despair (v7). These feelings are so much more than a bad day. Grief, distress and despair are the loss of a loved one, the loss of housing and uncertainty about the future, it is a threat to a person's life. They are strong and long-lasting human emotions and understandably many people have a hard time coping with them and don't know where to turn to.

David knew exactly where to look for help in the day of trouble! David turns to God! He pours out all his emotions and experiences before God. David is honest with God.

“Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; your servant who trusts in you.” (vv1-2)

At the beginning of the psalm, the cause of David's grief is not revealed to us, but verse 14 gives us some understanding of the situation.

“Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God; ruthless people are trying to kill me— they have no regard for you.”

David's life is in danger. Brave David, who defeated Goliath, warrior David, who fought with many enemies, is now in despair and scared for his life.

Have you had such experiences? Have there been such days? Were you afraid for your life or the lives of your loved ones?

The morning of February 24, 2022 forever changed the lives of my people. A full-scale war was at our doorstep. The days of mourning, grief and despair had come. Days when you do not know what awaits you, days when all your plans are destroyed in an instant, days when you are constantly afraid for your loved ones, days when you can lose everything in an instant.

What can help in such a situation? Who can help in such a situation?

I, probably like all people, experienced fear at the beginning of the war. On the first night, I didn't know how to go to bed. What awaited us? And the only thing that gave peace and hope was my Lord and faith in God, being in God's love! Perhaps I can say in the words of David, “Have mercy on me, Lord, for I call on You every day.” It was prayer and hope in God that supported me.

“For You, O Lord, are good and merciful and have great mercy on all who call on You.” (v5).

If you have a day of sorrow today, call the Lord into your life and entrust your life to the Lord! “For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God” (v10).

Tatiana Bondarenko

Romans 6:1-11b

What does God see and how does God save? Just as God did with Hagar in the desert, God saves with the provision of water – in this case, the water of baptism, which saves us from what *we see*, that we might become what *God sees*.

In this passage Paul is confronting a false notion of the privileges of salvation which seems to imply that the more we sin, the more we experience the joy of forgiveness. That would be like Hagar, gulping down the water from the well, only to wander off into the desert again to see if it would happen all over again!

Paul says, no, that we have been called to a new life through our union with Jesus in baptism. The Greek word *sumphutos* is used only here in the New Testament and speaks of a union like that of a new vine grafted into an old branch, the two becoming one in the process (see John 15). The union Paul is referring to is the holy union we have with Jesus, becoming one with Him in His death and resurrection. Baptism is the transforming moment in which we become something different to what we were before, dying to an old self and rising to a new self. It is of course, not the water itself, any more than it was the water in the desert. It is merely the means by which God teaches us what has happened to us in our *sumphutos* with Jesus. We are transformed and made new.

But for what? Is it simply for our pleasure or to secure our future in heaven? No, it is to turn our hearts to God in worship, and to turn our eyes towards others in service. We are to engage in the battle against the selfish ways of the old self so that we might live and love as Jesus did and continues to do through our holy union.

Rev John Carswell

Matthew 10:24-39

The new life does not come without hardship. In fact, the new life often *brings* hardship. As the Psalmist wrote, 'It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face,' (Psalm 69:7). As Jeremiah lamented, 'I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me,' (Jeremiah 20:7). Jesus warns of the same thing in this passage from Matthew, promising that those who follow Him will likely suffer the same abuse as He did, up to and including being likened to Satan. No matter, Jesus says. Do not be afraid, keep trying, keep working, keep shouting about what God has done for you. Your enemies can only kill your body, they cannot actually take your soul.

Following Christ, picking up your cross, leads in only one direction, to death. But remember, death for the believer, united with Christ in baptism, leads also to resurrection. This is, in the final measure, who we really are, died and risen again. To pretend otherwise is to deny Christ, and risk Him denying you! It is a costly discipleship that divides those who choose to follow from those who choose not to follow, even fathers from sons, mothers from daughters, husbands from wives. It is a hard road, but one that leads to the discovery of true life, lasting life, abundant life (John 10:10).

Rev John Carswell

Sermon ideas

All four of our readings are rich with themes relevant both to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, and to all followers of Jesus. Below are some suggestions on what could be developed from these readings.

The God who sees and hears

Our passages today reveal to us a God who sees us and a God who hears us. Hagar's story reflects the experience of many refugees. Hagar was forced to leave her home at least three times. The first, when she was taken from Egypt into slavery. The second, when she fled into the desert from Sarah's abuse, and third, as we read about today, when she and her son were cast out by Abraham and Sarah. This is not an uncommon experience: refugees often experience multiple displacements within their own country even before seeking asylum abroad.

In the desert Hagar experiences her lowest moment. Her child is dying and all she can do is weep. And yet Hagar is not alone. God came to her in her deepest need and responded to her cry, first with a listening ear, and then with life-sustaining water. This passage reveals to us a God of compassion and caring love. When the world had discarded Hagar, God did not.

God will not forget us. Our Gospel reading reassures us that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without God noticing (Matt 10:29). If that is true how much more will God hear the cries of those in need? God sees every refugee, every person in our community who is suffering, for all of us going through challenges today. This passage reminds us that we are never alone in our pain, we have a God of love who draws close to us and has counted every hair on our heads (Matt 10:30).

God sees us and God is faithful. This is what gave the Psalmist the confidence to cry out, "Turn to me and be gracious to me" (Psalm 86:16) and it's what gives Tatiana the confidence to say "You are the God who sees me! God – who saves me!"

Sin of rejection

If these passages reveal God's compassion for those in need, they also show us the ugly reality of human rejection. Hagar, an Egyptian living in a foreign land, was consistently mistreated. She was used by the people around her, treated with suspicion and mistrust, and eventually discarded when she was no longer of use to them. It is disturbing to see Abraham and Sarah, heroes of our faith, acting in such cruel and callous ways.

Yet, if we are honest, we can all find ourselves tempted to privilege the people who are closest to us. Jesus specifically challenged this instinct when He asked His disciples to place Him above their family relations (Matt 10.35). It is easy to put our tribe first and fail to extend that same consideration to those who seem strange to us.

Meeting with refugees can sometimes be uncomfortable for people who have not had those experiences. Refugees are people who come from different cultures from our own, they can speak different languages, and have a very different relationship with place and identity. There are unfortunately many who find those differences unsettling and a threat to their feelings of security. In addition, many refugees have also experienced immense trauma and loss in their lives. In the face of those needs it can be tempting to look away. Like the Priest and the Levite, we can cross to the other side of the road and leave the Samaritan uncared for.

But to do so is to miss on the opportunity to meet refugees as people. John Carswell has written elsewhere, "Encountering those who are so unmoored by their losses is not easy. But while the presence of the refugee is deeply challenging and to some, equally threatening, they nonetheless represent to the Church, above anyone else, a call to discover the hidden Christ in our midst." Refugees are more than their immigration status, they are people with stories, creativity, and gifts to share. Churches that have opened their doors to refugees can testify to the ways they enrich their community.

Paul tells us we consider ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11). Therefore, we must bury the old sins: the sin of racism, the sin of narrow-mindedness, the sin of failing to see the humanity of others. When we do, we will have the joy of encountering the stranger, not as a threat but as a blessing.

New life

Our readings from Romans and Matthew both speak of the promise of new life. We see this too in Genesis. God rescued Hagar and Ishmael by providing them life-sustaining water, and would continue to protect them. God did not lead them back to Abraham, nor to Egypt.

Ishmael would be raised in the wilderness, a place of real danger. Yet there he thrived in this barren and desolate place. Why? Because “God was with the boy”.

Every person who flees their home does so in search of a new life. They are looking for peace and safety, but before reaching their destination many have to spend years-long spells in the wilderness. Whether it is the harrowing and dangerous journeys that refugees have to make to reach safe countries, the complex bureaucratic systems they have to navigate in order to be given status, or the long process of making a new place their home, refugees are used to spending years in the wilderness.

And yet refugees continue to create new lives wherever they are. In spite of all the challenges refugees are constantly making homes, gathering communities, and finding moments of joy within all the suffering. Hope like this is not easy, it takes great courage and resilience to hold on to hope in the face of such overwhelming opposition. Yet they do, each and every day refugees thrive in the wilderness.

As Christians we have been called by Jesus to new life. In baptism we die to our old selves and are raised to a life of discipleship (Romans 6:4). This is a life of great joy, but also real challenges. As John Carswell comments (above), “The new life does not come without hardship. In fact, the new life often *brings* hardship.” Jesus called us to pick up our crosses and follow Him (Matt 10:38). This means leaving safe and familiar places and letting go of identities that give us security. Jesus calls us out into the wilderness.

Yet like Ishmael and so many refugees, we can thrive in the wilderness. As John Carswell notes in his reflection, God saves us with the water of baptism as an ongoing act of transformation. Discipleship brings challenges but it is also a lifegiving path, full of joy and hope. In this then, perhaps we should see refugees not as alien other, but as fellow sojourners living in hope. Or, in the words of John Carswell, “In the death of all that is familiar, let us welcome the stranger and find our true selves in Christ.”

David Moodie

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

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 His 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 Him 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 Him.
May He 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 the God gives us peace
help the war in Russia and Ukraine 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 His 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 His 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

Additional Material

Resources to use as part of your worship service, home groups, Bible studies, etc.

“The God who sees me: Worship resources for Sanctuary Sunday”. On 10 May 2023 Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees are launching a resource pack for churches to help you mark Sanctuary Sunday in your congregations. Book your place at this online event before 5pm on 9 May <https://preparingforsanctuarysunday.eventbrite.co.uk> This resource pack will also be available online on the Church of Scotland and SFAR websites.

Stories from Visits to Detainees at Dungavel

Anadia (*name changed*)

I don't meet many women at Dungavel IRC (Immigration Removal Centre) because it is a dedicated men's facility. Women who arrive at Dungavel will be detained for only a few days before they are moved to the women's facility in Derwentside, near Durham. I was very glad to spend time talking to Anadia and I remember her story as she was so inspirational to me and my cohort.

Anadia was from Pakistan and had come to the UK for an arranged marriage with a man she'd never met. Her two elder sisters had done the same and now had permanent right to remain. When she arrived, Anadia spoke no English. Coming from her rural village in Pakistan, she had very little education. It wasn't long into her new marriage that she discovered her husband was abusive and for a time she endured a life of domestic violence. Eventually, she decided to leave and, having made contact with one of her sisters, she left her home. This was to be a temporary arrangement because, as she explained, "My sister has her own husband and family and didn't really have room for me in their house." Some time later, she moved to live with her other sister in a similar, temporary arrangement.

To her credit, Anadia was determined to learn to speak English and so had enrolled in an ESOL group (English for Speakers of Other Languages). It was during one of these classes that she was arrested and held for detention. She argued vehemently with the police that her case was under review with the Home Office, and she shouldn't be detained. Unfortunately, at the time of her arrest, the police were unable to make contact with her lawyer, and so she was held.

As an asylum seeker, Anadia has very few rights in the UK. She cannot take a job or hire a flat or open a bank account or apply for a driver's licence. She is entitled to a very small stipend of £37 per week for the duration of time it takes for her asylum application to wend its way through the Home Office courts, a process that often takes months or even years to complete. Until she is granted refugee status, she is wholly dependent on the kindness of others for her day-to-day survival. Additionally, divorce in Pakistani culture carries a heavy stigma, especially for women, so she struggles to find a place, even amongst her own countrymen.

She is a strong, intelligent and independent young woman who now speaks fluent English and is determined to remain in the UK. Going back home, she argued, would be impossible and would deny her the opportunity for further education.

“What would you like to be?” we asked.

“I want to be an immigration lawyer.”

As someone who has been through the system, I can think of no better candidate.

Hasan (*name changed*)

“If I was sent back to my country my government would kill me.”

Not an ordinary opening line when meeting someone for the first time, but this is how Hasan introduced himself when we met at the Dungavel detention centre.

He went on to explain that he was Kurdish and, many years ago, in his home country of Iran, he was passing out leaflets in protest of government policies. He was alerted to the fact that several of his friends had already been arrested and that he must literally flee for his life. He managed to escape to Turkey and then on to France, where he ended up in Calais before getting to the UK on the back of a lorry.

“If you want to help people, you should go to Calais. They are all desperate to get into the UK. I managed to get onto a lorry, but it wasn’t the first time I tried. People there will keep trying, ten times, a hundred times until they succeed.”

Talking to Hasan was like seeing the morning headlines in flesh and blood. I remember the persecution of the Kurdish people some years ago and of course, I’d heard about Calais, but have never been there. Talking to Hasan brought it all home to me as very real.

Hasan has been in Britain for 16 years, but in that time, he has never managed to get full asylum status and consequently lives in the shadow economy, struggling to make ends meet by working illegally, often at car washes, where government inspectors regularly turn up to arrest and detain illegal workers, like Hasan.

He was in Dungavel as a ‘foreign national offender’, meaning someone who is detained following a prison sentence. “I had to steal to survive, and I got caught. There was no other way.”

Foreign nationals who serve a prison sentence of more than 12 months are automatically sent to detention following their term. Only a quarter of them are informed of this fact prior to their release and they end up going straight from prison to detention. I have spoken to many who have been through that experience and invariably they say the same thing, “I

would rather be in prison than being here. At least in prison you know how long you have left.” I’m told that in prison you count down to your release; in detention, you count up. Britain remains the only country in Europe that has no time limit on detention. Many spend months, and some a year or more waiting for release. In Europe, there is a 28-day limit to detention.

At the time of writing (February 2023) Hasan remains in detention, still awaiting the outcome of his most recent appeal to the Home Office. He is learning to work as a barber. After leaving Iran, Hasan learned that his friends had been put to death by the government, lending credence to his initial introduction and his claim for asylum.

Reflection

Visiting at Dungavel invariably leaves me thinking, “I don’t know what I’m doing, here.” I feel inadequate for the task, ill-equipped and under-resourced, but then, it’s not about me and my little anxieties. It is simply being present to one who is detained against their will. This is gift enough. It is a disarming feeling and one that brings me face to face with the discomfort that comes with following a crucified Saviour. I heard it said once that, beneath the cross, there is no level ground. In other words, it’s not supposed to make us feel comfortable or comforted; if we are not horrified by the cross, we are missing the point. But we go anyway, not because we want to, but because we have to, because we are called to go. I go to Dungavel (and in truth, to all acts of compassionate service) not because I want to, but because I *need to*. It is a costly grace that has been shared with me and, while Christ still suffers, naked, hungry, imprisoned, a stranger, the call remains, “go.” I can’t fix their problems but strangely, they help fix mine by being kind enough and vulnerable enough to share their often-agonising stories. In doing so, our roles are reversed; it is they who welcome me.

Rev John Carswell

Journeys of Faith and Welcome

A series of videos produced to celebrate the stories of New Scots and faith communities, and the role faith has played in their journeys of seeking, finding and offering sanctuary. We encourage communities across Scotland to show these videos in their local contexts, as part of worship services, events, discussion groups or prayer meetings. Available from the SFAR website: <https://www.sfar.org.uk/inspiring-video-series-launched/>

“God With Us”

An ecumenical worship resource on the theme of refugees, migration and sanctuary. Available to download from the Church of Scotland website: ["God With Us"](#)

Musical suggestions

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.

- CH4 166 – “Lord of all hopefulness”
- CH4 168 – “God weeps at love withheld”
- CH4 195 – “Here to the house of God we come” (alternative tunes: Abingdon, Melita)
- CH4 198 – “Let us build a house where love can dwell”
- CH4 250 – “Sent by the Lord am I”
- CH4 251 – “I, the Lord of sea and sky”
- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger”
- CH4 258 – “When the hungry who have nothing share with strangers”
- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness”
- CH4 265 – “Pray for a world where every child”
- CH4 291 – “When out of poverty is born” (Christmas Carol)
- CH4 360 – “Jesus Christ is waiting”
- CH4 362 – “Heaven shall not wait”
- CH4 465 – “Be thou my Vision”
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness”
- CH4 544 – “When I needed a neighbour were you there”
- CH4 566 – “When I receive the peace of Christ”
- CH4 624 – “In Christ there is no east or west”
- CH4 694 – “Brother, sister, let me serve you”

- CH4 706 – “For the healing of the nations” (alternative tunes: Westminster Abbey, Cwm Rhondda)
- Further hymns, songs and chants can be found on the CTBI website:
<https://ctbi.org.uk/god-with-us-hymns-songs-music/>
- The [Songs2Serve](#) website offers intercultural songs of worship in a multitude of languages, with lyrics and translations into English.
- “[God With Us](#)” – pages 46-50

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’.
- While singing in our congregations is still 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

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

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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Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.