



WELCOME

welcome weekend



Resources

PLEASE SIGN UP HERE: <http://bit.ly/welcomeweekendreg> TO REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE IN WELCOME WEEKEND & TO SHARE WHAT YOUR CHURCH IS DOING TO HELP REFUGEES!!

Prayers:

Call to Worship

Leader: Creator of all, we gather today thankful that you have welcomed us.

All: We give thanks that through our hardest times, God has heard our cry.

Leader: Just as God has accompanied us on our journey, we are called to walk alongside those who have been mistreated, persecuted and outcast.

All: Together as a faith community, we are called to be a space of love and safe refuge for all people.

Leader: Let us work together with refugees and immigrants from many different lands to welcome them in, and let us pray that the crisis in Syria might soon end, so displaced people can someday return to their homeland.

All: As we wait for You to answer these prayers, we re-commit ourselves to be a welcoming congregation lifting up immigrants and refugees in our midst and preparing ourselves to advocate with them by our side. Amen

Prayers of the People

Oh God, our creator and liberator, we pray for all those who face the trials and tribulations of exclusion. We lift up all those who have been made outcast in our world; for those impoverished by inequality, for those who find themselves in the cold from homelessness, for those who are treated differently because of their skin color or religious background. Today on this welcome weekend, we say a special prayer for all the refugees in the world who have faced violence and persecution. Now many of them face discrimination upon arriving to the safety of this land. Strengthen our faith to be accepting to all and fortify our witness to advocate for just and humane policies that expand the path of welcome for refugees to join our communities. In the same way, we pray for all those who face sickness and disease, in our congregation and throughout our community, may Your blessing comfort them and may Your healing power touch them. In the Spirit of love and compassion we pray. Amen.

Poem:

"Home" by Warsan Shire

(Note: Warsan Shire is a Somali poet, born in Kenya, and working as a writer and educator in London. Her debut book was "Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth," published in 2011 by flipped eye.)

Consider reading selections of Shire's powerful poem below, to build understanding of a refugee as one who, according to Article 1 of the U.N.'s "1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees", is: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

HOME, by Warsan Shire

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.

i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave.

run away from me now
i don't know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Sermon Pointers:

Sermon Talking Points on Lectionary Text: 1 Samuel 1:4-20

The passage takes place in Shiloh, which was the center of the religious life of the people. Eli, the High Priest, resided there, and the Sanctuary of Shiloh became the place where Hannah came in the passage to pray, revealing the misery of her painful need for a son. Her prayer was to be ultimately heard by God, resulting in the birth of Samuel, and the revival of prophecy for the people through him. In this passage, our emphasis will be on Hannah, the characteristics of her plea, and the relationship of her seeking to the recognition sought currently by the world's refugees.

- Hannah was suffering in deep pain. Her causes for pain were multiple. As Hannah had been unable to conceive, her husband, Elkanah—though he was described as having loved her very much—nonetheless married another woman, Peninnah. Peninnah produced the children he desired, yet left Hannah aching in her heart. Consequently, within the family, there was conflict. Rather than having compassion upon Hannah, Peninnah (perhaps especially because she perceived the great love of Elkanah for her), constantly persecuted and taunted her. Outside the family, Hannah likewise experienced criticism because of her perceived weakness of being unable to conceive and bear a child (especially a son) within a culture where that was valued so deeply.

As was true for Hannah, the pain of refugees is likewise from multiple sources. Especially within Syria, the conflict has been long term—as the war is now in the midst of its fifth year. The numbers of refugees that have been produced are unprecedented from a single region, and have exceeded 4 million. Additionally, 7 million more remain internally displaced in Syria—moved from their original homes, even if still within their homeland. To further exacerbate the misery of refugees, there is external and global lack of understanding of the complexities of the Syrian crisis. Syria's is not a sectarian crisis at its roots, but arose after pushbacks to peaceful revolts against the country's leadership in 2011.

The pain of refugees likewise results from personal criticisms, abuse, and policy pushbacks encountered as refugees move along their journeys from place to place and nation to nation. This summer's media carried evidence of these multiple forms of resistance. Even more so, the processing is longterm, and security checks are multiple and rigorous-- making refugees the most heavily scrutinized of all populations who enter into the United States!

Some refugees entering into the United States now began their processing in 2009! Nevertheless, many in leadership and in our communities continue to misunderstand the high level of scrutiny already experienced by entering refugees; and so mistakenly feel afraid to receive refugees, who are seeking protection and safety.

- Hannah was without power in multiple ways. Just as Hannah's pain was generated through multiple sources, she likewise faced a host of challenges as one who was powerless on many fronts. She was a woman in a traditional patriarchal society. She had an inability to conceive, which likewise led to a recognition that she would be unable to produce a male son who could support her and her family in their life and in old age. She had to "share" her husband with a second wife, who mistreated her.

Yet, as the passage unfolds, we see that Hannah used the strengths and creativity she had to find wise ways to seek a path to safety and new possibilities for her life. She employed her faith, her voice, and her consistent urging in order to ultimately be granted attention to her pleas.

Parallels with refugees cannot be missed; refugees, as well, demonstrate consistent creativity and resourcefulness. Although refugees have left their homes, the stories of refugee experiences in their resettlement in the U.S. (see the stories provided in this resource) document how refugees have “found their way” over land, over seas, and beyond problems to ultimately resettle in our neighborhoods.

- Hannah was perceptive, and knew a response from one in power was essential to improvement of her condition. Hannah’s pain, by verse 8, had led her to despondency and depression. She was clearly at a point where her health was at risk, and where ongoing hopelessness was at her doorstep. However, the passage turns in verse 9 as Hannah determined to carry herself, though exhausted in body and soul, to present her needs. Verse 9 says, “Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord.” It is nearly unimaginable to consider the amount of courage needed to make such a presentation—yet she understood well that a response from one more powerful than herself was needed if her condition were to ever change.

Today, with more refugees than many decades around the world, we are in a moment where refugees likewise need responsiveness from our government, and from our communities, to help at least some of the millions to find a way out of despair. In this very month of Welcome Weekend, in our country, the “appropriations process” is occurring which gives an opportunity for our nation to be responsive to the greatest needs of the world. As constituents, we can make a difference now, as we encourage the President to ask Congress for additional funds to support the needs of refugees, and as we request Congress to support additional refugee numbers and to offer additional financing to support them. We can gain courage from Hannah, who asked even at the point of her great exhaustion, for what was needed to change the condition of her misery.

- Hannah’s faith was pervasive, persistent, and offered with a promise. As Hannah put forward her asks, she did so in a style of passionate prayer, pouring out her soul to God—whose power was the greatest she knew she could approach. She cried while she prayed, she was praying silently (vs. 13)—but she also was fully active in offering ALL that she could, in order to seek God’s loving response. There are few more humble, yet determined, acts that we can read within the scriptures!! She was not seeking the pity of God, or of the priest Eli; rather, she was seeking to be HEARD. And, she clearly did not see herself as only a victim in her pain, but rather “arrived ready” to offer a lifetime of commitment from herself, as well as dedication of her future son, if she was to be granted the blessing of having one. Her promise was to dedicate him as a Nazirite, whose life would be fully focused upon living faithfully and gratefully to God.

Refugees who live in our communities now most often do so gratefully, and greatly enhance the abundance of our own communities. Refugees contribute by paying taxes immediately. They come “work eligible” with their refugee status—and many bring long-term skills from past careers that they are ready to invest here in their new home upon resettling! Most don’t even know that refugees also pay back every penny of the cost of their air flight tickets to come to the U.S. Will we help them to fulfill the promises their dangerous journeys have made them so determined to offer?

- Hannah is ultimately paid attention to! In the passage, we can praise God that—even though Eli first perceived that Hannah was only a drunken woman—she ultimately convinces him of the

sincerity of her request. He blesses her as she leaves, finally hearing her—yet knowing that it must be God’s power which grants her ask (vs. 17). When Hannah leaves the temple, her whole outlook had changed. Hannah’s deep love of God is to be commended, and is rewarded by God’s granting of a son to her.

Faith communities in recent months and years have expressed tremendous respect for refugees from multiple faiths; those who are Christian, but also others of multiple faiths who have suffered deeply. At this time, we are seeing constantly—and challenged to hear—the cries of suffering by Syrians and other refugees. Will we respond to the cries brought to our ears? Will we act like we hear them? There are concrete ways we can honor the suffering, and show that we have heard their needs, through our Welcome Weekend and following actions—holding dinners with refugees (and perhaps with our local legislators, too!), calling to request additional support for entering refugees, and opening our arms to all who come locally.

Syrian Refugee Stories:

Read these stories of challenging refugee journeys from around the world, and tales of welcome from throughout the U.S.:

- Syrian refugee family in Jersey City, NJ: <http://abc7ny.com/news/syrian-refugee-families-in-jersey-city-highlight-growing-migrant-crisis/979836/>
- Al Roustom family in Jersey City, NJ: http://www.buzzfeed.com/purvithacker/two-families-who-fled-war-torn-syria-face-a-new-challenge-re?bftwnews&utm_term=.rpPmm4gB9#.ljpYYJ5O6
- Story on resettlement process with Syrian refugees, including existing Syrian community: <http://www.wzzm13.com/videos/news/local/2015/09/15/some-syrian-refugees-settling-in-west-michigan/72334990/>
- NPR story on Syrian refugee resettlement in US: <http://www.npr.org/2015/10/20/450221327/among-the-lucky-few-syrian-family-rebuilds-in-americas-heartland>
- The CWS Blog: Building the welcome for Syrian refugees in Lancaster: <http://www.cwsglobal.org/blog/syrian-refugees-in-lancaster.html>

Additional Background Information:

-This October 21, 2015 NY Times article shows how few Syrian refugees have thus far made it to the U.S., but shows the communities where they have resettled thus far:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/21/us/where-syrian-refugees-are-in-the-united-states.html?_r=0

-As people of faith, we are called to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable. We have a moral responsibility to welcome refugees and immigrants and stand with them as advocates against any legislation that would discriminate against them. Many of our faith communities have made recent statements that affirm these values.

-The beliefs expressed by extremist groups like ISIS are in direct conflict with the key tenants of the Islamic faith. Islam does not promote violence, discrimination, or persecution. Instead, it is a faith much like ours, promoting peace, welcome, and harmony with all people, regardless of religion.

Raise Your Faith Voices, and ACT NOW to help Refugees!:

1) SUPPORT ADDITIONAL REFUGEE NUMBERS AND AID, BY CALLING YOUR CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS!!

NOW is a crucial time to build support for refugees, during the Congressional appropriations processes occurring over the next several weeks. Funds are needed to provide essential functions for refugee processing, as well as to support additional numbers of refugees seeking protection. ** (Look for a Call In Alert to be posted on the interfaithimmigration.org website by November 2nd.)****

2) PLAN A MEAL WITH REFUGEES in your area—and INVITE your local Congressional representative and staff!

(Note: Legislators will be in their HOME DISTRICTS during the Thanksgiving Recess of NOVEMBER 20-29 (for the Senate) or NOVEMBER 21-29 (for the House). **YOU MAY ALSO BE ABLE TO INVITE YOUR HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE TO YOUR “WELCOME WEEKEND” EVENT ON NOV. 13-15, as the House will also be in Recess during that time, as well!**

3) USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE THE STORY OF YOUR FAITH GROUP’S HOSPITALITY!

Social media is a great way to spread the word about these issues and to get your friends, family, and other community members involved. Using popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we encourage you to post a picture of your event utilizing the signs found at americawelcomes.us and using #RefugeesWelcome.

If you are not able to take a group photo of all people participating in your event, take individual photos with the America Welcomes sign and use #RefugeesWelcome -- any and all posts are welcome!

Sample posts:

-The Congregation/Family Name is ready to welcome #refugees! #RefugeesWelcome (photo)

-To welcome is to be whole. We are committed to welcoming #refugees in our community! #RefugeesWelcome (photo)

-ORGANIZATION NAME stands with our #immigrant and #refugee neighbors. #RefugeesWelcome (photo)

-Our community is proud to welcome more #refugees. CITY is ready to welcome! #RefugeesWelcome (photo)

