ON WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS & REFUGEES

Jesus as Refugee, Hospitality and Table Fellowship
‘The Flight into Egypt’, Giotto di Bondone (1304–06)
‘How often have I read that Saint Joseph and the Virgin fled to Egypt. But only now, when an army patrol has just come, have I really understood that very real and harsh circumstance that the gospel presents to us here: repression. We can imagine what that means: leaving at night, hiding with great fear, leaving everything behind, and having to reach the border because they are being pursued.’

(as quoted by Stephen Burns, Welcoming Asylum Seekers, p. 12)
'The Flight into Egypt', Giotto di Bondone (1304–06)
'The central symbol of the new vision of life, the Kingdom of God, is a community joined together in a festive meal where the bread that sustains life and the joy that sustains the spirit are shared with all'.

(Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, p. 173)
‘Since he who was innocent, sinless, and fully within God’s camp transgressed social boundaries that excluded the outcasts, these boundaries themselves were evil, sinful, and outside God’s will ... By embracing the ‘outcast’, Jesus underscored the ‘sinfulness’ of the persons and systems that cast them out.’

(Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 72)
The Eucharist

• supreme act of hospitality
• foreshadows the great heavenly banquet
• symbolises and re-enacts Jesus’ inclusive and socially levelling table fellowship
• celebration of God’s welcome and hospitality
• affirmation of the community’s solidarity with the poor, the aliens and the marginalized
‘By sharing bread with one another around the Lord’s Table, Christians … develop the skills of distribution, of the poor sharing their bread with the rich, and the rich with the poor. They develop the skills of equality, of the valued place of the differently abled, differently gendered and oriented people, those of assorted races and classes and medical, criminal, and social histories. They develop the practices of giving and receiving … They practice the virtues of justice, generosity, and hope.’

(Samuel Wells, Improvisation, p. 83)
‘Celebrations of Communion buoyed up by traditional Anglican and other Protestant theologies of ‘worthy reception’ are not an encouraging basis for hospitality to asylum seekers, or anyone else for that matter.’

(Stephen Burns, Welcoming Asylum Seekers, p. 24)
'The [Eucharist] showed us how to re-member what had been dis-membered by human attempts to separate and divide, judge and cast out, select or punish'.

Jesus said, ‘feed my sheep’. ‘He didn’t say, “Feed my sheep after you check their ID”’.

(Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, pp. 76-77, 150)
The Eucharist is a ‘powerful psychological intervention’ and ‘a ritual that is fundamentally altering and remaking the psyche’.

(Richard Beck, *Unclean*, pp. 113, 114)
• Matthew’s story of Joseph, Mary and Jesus as refugees

• Luke’s account of the nativity, i.e. Jesus receiving hospitality from the society into which he was born

• Jesus associating with, and reaching out to, the poor and the morally suspect – and how that relates to our lives and ministry generally, as well as to the church’s mission to asylum seekers and refugees more specifically

• the kingdom of God as a realm of hospitality, in which everyone enjoys life and dignity

• the notion that divisive boundaries are evil, sinful and outside God’s will

• the Eucharist:
  • a supreme act of hospitality
  • a foreshadowing of the heavenly banquet
  • a re-enactment of Jesus’ inclusive table fellowship
  • an affirmation of the community’s solidarity with the marginalised and excluded
  • and the notion of ‘worthy reception’