

Hymn: God is our refuge and our strength

<https://youtu.be/JzNgFWYVgs4>

Prayer of Approach and Confession and the Lord's Prayer

Loving Heavenly Father,

we join together in worship acknowledging that
you are our refuge and our strength,
you are our help in any time of need.

we praise you that you walk beside us through
all the ups and downs of our lives.

We praise you that we can put our hand in yours,
knowing that you will lead, support and hold us
throughout our lives, that you will supply all our needs
and far more besides.

We praise you for our experience of that truth across the years –
the way you have held firm to us
despite our faults and faithlessness,
never letting go of us even when we let go of you.

Forgive us that we so often let go,
intent on going our own way,
thinking that we can do things through our own power.
Forgive us for doubting you when times are hard
questioning your ability to lead us through.
Forgive us for reaching out only when we have need of you.

Let us know your grace and mercy now as we bring our failings
before you in the silence

SILENCE

Loving Heavenly Father,

we thank you for the peace that comes with your forgiveness
help us to put our hand again in yours, in simple trust, quiet
confidence, and eager expectation, knowing that whatever we
face and wherever we may find ourselves, you will hold us firm.
We ask these our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord
who taught us to pray saying: Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on
earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And

forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever Amen.

Bible Readings: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Mark 4:35-41 (GNT)

Hymn: 532 Lord you have come to the seashore

<https://youtu.be/IQM5nvsvtxU>

Reflection

The disciples in our story from Mark's Gospel and those early Christians in Corinth were going through difficult times. The church at Corinth was surrounded by idolatry and immorality. The Christians there really struggled with their faith and lifestyle and through personal visits and letters, Paul tried to instruct them and help them. In verses 4-20 there is a long list of things that Paul has endured. The entire list of hardships and sufferings shows that Paul has been exposed to the ups and downs of life, to the extremes of shame and honour, from insult to good rapport, from being understood to misunderstood – yet, throughout all of this he has endured and remained steadfastly dependable and faithful. He uses his own experience as an example for the Corinthian Christians. Throughout all he has suffered God has been with him.

Christ is with the disciples in that boat in our reading from Mark's Gospel and they were frightened even those who were fishermen were frightened. The Sea of Galilee is 600 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills. People living near the coasts and those who sailed the waters knew well that the winds that blew so close to the sea could cause violent and unexpected storms with little or no warning. The boat is in danger of capsizing, the disciples are panicking and terrified BUT Jesus calmly sleeps on a cushion in the stern of the boat.

They wake Jesus up with their cries, and demand, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" Jesus rebukes the storm in an echo of Psalm 107: "He stilled the storm to a whisper, and quieted the waves of the sea."

Sometimes when we are going through hard times and our figurative boats are in danger of capsizing we too struggle with this question. "Do you not care if we perish?" That very human question is one that haunts all human life as we struggle to understand the mystery of God. For sometimes, when the storms come up and the wind and waves rock the boat, it can seem to us as if God does not care.

Even a giant of faith like Martin Luther knew that feeling. He wrote movingly about the "hidden God," making the point that sometimes there are events and situations in our lives where it just seems that we cannot see God anymore and that he seems to have vanished. God is sleeping - God is hidden - it all boils down to that same question that the panic-stricken disciples scream: "Don't you care?"

Now we can see the answer to that question in what Jesus did. He commanded the wind to be quiet, says Mark, and told the sea to be still.

Then Jesus says to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?" But the very fact that Jesus has calmed the storm for them proves to them that he is indeed no ordinary man for the wind and waves obey him and in that very fact, their faith is affirmed and grows stronger.

We have been through some deeply troubling times in this past 15 months. Never before have we lived through such times and yes, I am sure that from time to time we have thought those same words 'Don't you care? BUT throughout it all God has been with us. When Jesus told the wind and waves to be still and quiet, I think that those words were for the disciples as well. They were anxious and worried and his presence and words brought them calm and peace. It reminds me of that much quoted wartime saying; keep calm and carry on. It is our faith in God and our confidence that Christ is with us through all our tribulations that helps us to keep calm and carry on.

Today is Sanctuary or Refugee Sunday, which this year also coincides with World Refugee Day, which is celebrated on the

20th June every year. We have heard many news reports about refugees this past year. Stories of people landing on our shores from other countries, stories of those lost at sea in the storms, stories of inhospitable accommodation, of suffering and hardship.

There are more displaced people in the world today than at any other point in history. The Bible is clear in its expression of God's loving concern for the stranger and refugee. There is, if you like, a scriptural mandate for us Christians to act compassionately and humanely towards those who have had to flee their homes and seek safety elsewhere. Sanctuary Sunday is an opportunity to be reminded of the need to welcome the stranger, the alien and the traveller and to see, in them, our common humanity, all created in the image of God, all deserving of dignity and worth.

Sanctuary Sunday is also a day when Christians are encouraged to pray for the situation facing refugees; commemorating those who have lost their lives on the journey to freedom as well as celebrating the contribution refugees are making to our common life here in Scotland.

Issues of migration and refugee protection are increasingly politically controversial. The rise of far-right populist movements and the response of politicians to migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe, or even the small numbers attempting to travel across the English Channel are generating headlines and disagreement. Sanctuary Sunday is an opportunity for Christians to come together and to be salt and light in this situation. Where our government is hostile, the church can stand out as being welcoming and hospitable and many churches across Scotland are.

We should never forget what it is that compels people to leave their homes and seek sanctuary elsewhere: war, persecution, poverty, disease, climate change, natural disaster, no home, no jobs, no food, no water ... People do not just leave their homes for no reason.

Where society displays fear of the stranger, the Christian can show love and welcome. Where the refugee and asylum seeker are treated with indignity, hate, rejection or apathy, the Church can show dignity and express care, warmth, compassion and inclusivity. Celebrating Sanctuary Sunday is an opportunity to join

in prayer and solidarity, but also to raise awareness, and to welcome the stranger and do this openly and proudly and if we don't have the opportunity to do this ourselves we can support others who do.

One project we can support is the Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees which is a multi-faith partnership project hosted by the Church of Scotland. It seeks to co-ordinate and promote action by faith communities in Scotland to support asylum seekers and refugees. They are working with Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Interfaith groups.

"Through our commitment to each other" it says on their website, "and a sharing of common values of human dignity and protection, we have our own story to tell of hospitality and welcome."

Be calm says Jesus, 'Open your hearts', says Paul.

Know that Christ is with you through all your storms and troubles but know that as he brought peace and stillness and calm - you too can be his presence bringing peace and stillness and calm to others in difficulties too. Amen

Prayers for Others:

God of surprising grace,
in our weakness you are our strength,
in our darkness light, in all the storms of life
You are our comfort and peace
and from everlasting to everlasting You are our God.

As we bless you for the life of our congregation/s,
our life together in the church,
we pray for the health and well-being of the church worldwide
and all the variety of its worship and witness.
Let your church give heart and voice
to your continuing concern for people afraid and in need.

As war continues to rage in many places, as floods rise, and disease spreads and desperate people risk life and limb in the sea seeking sanctuary, look with mercy on those who are fleeing from danger,
frightened and far from home.

Inspire compassion and generosity and welcome in all our hearts. Bless those who work to provide rescue and shelter, peace and calm and kindness.

We pray for our own nation and other nations too, in these days of pandemic for all those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected, for the sick and bereaved, the worried and the anxious. We pray for all those who face great challenges, who experience inequality, discrimination and persecution.

We pray for wholeness where there is brokenness

As in Christ's presence people found healing and peace and calm, we pray for those left feeling betrayed or left behind, whose hearts are filled with anger.

We pray for all those people who long for comfort and peace in the storms of their life and we pray for those whom we know personally who are in need of prayer today.

SILENCE

Let them know your presence, your peace, healing and comfort, we pray.

Loving Heavenly father, we bring our thanks today for fathers; for their presence for their love, for their guidance, for their memory for all they taught us that makes us the people we are today. We bring our thanks and remember that you, O God, are our Loving Heavenly Father too:

For the new way of life you have set before us in Christ.

For your truth to inspire us, and your love to sustain us.

For the dawning of your kingdom and all who work towards its fulfilment. We bless you and give you our thanksgiving.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for evermore.

Amen

Hymn: 737 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life

<https://youtu.be/PTfypuXwrMA>