

REFLECTION JUNE 14TH 2026 'JESUS WAS A REFUGEE'

Today marks the beginning of refugee week. I've often been reminded of the fact that so often Jesus was a refugee in his own time. He wandered around to various places and rarely really welcomed in villages –he didn't even feel welcomed in his own village, a feeling of never really belonging anywhere and yet he was in his own kingdom.

Today's reflection is a bit wider than the verses we have just heard so hopefully I can cover our readings in good time. In Matthew chapters 9 & 10, we gain a momentary time when Jesus steps decisively into a world of great need, where healing isn't just a miracle but offers a certainty of belonging. He calls Matthew the tax collector, eats with sinners, frees those with mental health issues, and speaks of the Kingdom breaking into ordinary hours and lives and just now we're also entering into our Ordinary Time of the Liturgical Calendar. Then, in chapter 10, he commissions his followers to go to the villages, to declare good news, to heal, and to endure what's coming. If we allow ourselves to read these two chapters through the lens of naming Jesus and disciples as refugees of their time, we enable ourselves to become witnesses of an emerging deeper compassion through which we can see their mobility, their vulnerability, and their radical invitation as gifts to a world aching for welcome.

To consider Jesus as a refugee is to acknowledge that his life took place on the fringes of power struggles and threats. Not just in the political arena, but also in the Jewish structures. His own birth happened under Roman oversight and governmental movement; his family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. Matthews language about Jesus' itinerant ministry; no fixed home, no permanent sanctuary, echoes a refrain common to refugees: a life lived in transit, in spaces between promises and peril, in places where safe shelter is uncertain. Having no post code is detrimental to a sense of belonging. When Jesus calls Matthew and shares a meal with him the moment opens up an unsettling moral climate of the era; it's as if Jesus, a refugee from the rigid security of the religious hierarchy, extends hospitality to those deemed to be illegitimate or dangerous. The table becomes a border crossing, a place where categories dissolve and a new form of family begins to be built in shared hunger and shared mercy.

If we can read Matthew's chapters through the lens of refugee experiences, we will soon be able to join the dots on how the disciples themselves became refugees-in-mission. They leave whatever home they knew to travel from village to village, town to town, with little more than the authority given to them by Jesus and the hope of a message that refuses to be contained to a piece of paper to be read and learned by rote. They faced rejection, danger, even the prospect of persecution. Yet their mobility, like that of refugees who carry only necessary tools, memories, stories, and a vision of safety they're yet to find, becomes the very means through which healing and truth spread. They're not sent out with any guarantees of safety, lodgings, finances, transport, they're sent with a real mandate to proclaim, to heal, to bear witness in the very places where fear and need crash into each other.

Thinking of it this way doesn't lessen the seriousness of the risks it increases the call to a costly generosity. Jesus instructs them to go "to the lost sheep of Israel" first, then to broaden the invitation because this isn't where the story ends. The refugee conscience is one that's hoping after taking the risky path, what follows is a place where they can be welcomed. The disciples go as bearers of a good news that doesn't require perfect safety but calls for faithful presence. They carry Christ's authority to heal the sick, to cleans the unclean, to cast out demonic fear, acts that in a refugee frame, are acts of restoring belonging, not only curing bodies but reconstituting social trust.

There's a quiet subversiveness in the refugee dimension of this mission. Jesus tells the disciples not to hoard power or secure their own comfort, but to travel light, to rely on the hospitality of the villages they visit, to accept what is given and endure their hardships. In a world where borders are policed by suspicion, the disciples' instruction to wipe or shake off the dust from their feet if a place doesn't welcome them feels a bit like a stark boundary of exclusion. Yet it's a boundary that's given to preserve the very integrity of the mission and the dignity of the people they want to serve. Later in the New Testament Paul instructs Timothy to make sure that the integrity of the Good News is kept as it should and not be altered to suit others. They aren't passive recipients of a humanitarian project; they're active participants in a story of movement, risk, and two-sided welcomes.

Hospitality on these terms becomes central to our conversations about Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit. The early church's memory of Jesus as a refugee, itinerant teacher, healer, miracle worker on the margins helps us as we have become the hands and feet of Christ in our practice of hospitality as one form of mission. Hospitality goes beyond the provision of food and shelter; it's about recognising that the image of God is also witnessed in the face of the stranger who is also one of God's beloved children. When Jesus instructs his disciples to heal, to cast out, to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom, the implicit invitation is for communities along the road to become places of transformation. The refugee gospel asks: Where are we displaced in our own towns and churches? Who are the people we're fearful of? How can our places of worship become hospitable so that the gospel doesn't just travel through us but travels with us into the neighbourhoods we say belong to others?

If we think about this more intentionally and deeply, the disciples' experience can become a mirror for our own spiritual journeys. There are seasons in our lives when we have to leave the relative safety of our familiar routines, stepping into places of pain or uncertainty to bear witness to goodness. There are moments when we carry the burdens of others as if they were our own, the weight of migrant stores, the ache of fear in an uncertain political climate, the longing for a place to simply belong. The good news Jesus proclaims isn't that we won't experience various and many challenges but that the presence of God accompanies us on the journey all the way to other side. "*Though I walk through the valley of death, you are with me*" familiar words to each of us. The disciples' authority is grounded in Jesus' own mission which is to bring healing, mercy and revelation that God's Kingdom is near. Their work, (and ours), though fraught with risk, points toward an in-breaking of God's mercy into our brokenness.

As you move through this week I invite you to reflect and contemplate on both of these chapters and imagine St Ninian's as a place where the refugee story is welcomed as good news. What would it mean to listen first, to sit at tables with those who are often labeled as expendable or dangerous, to learn from people whose lives have been shaped by displacement? One could reminisce on the Easter of 2024 when we had the children come from Kenya and the stories of displacement they shared with us. The disciples were sent with a simple message: '*The Kingdom of heaven has come near.*' For us, that message becomes a call to enact the nearness of God in every corner of our communities, to be present with those who are in a time of uncertainty, to offer shelter in spirit and, wherever possible, in reality, and to share healing as part of the journey toward wholeness.

At the heart of my reflection today, Jesus as a refugee and the disciples as travelers don't absolve us of responsibility but rather take us into a deeper solidarity with the vulnerable. We're called to be a people who welcome the stranger as we would welcome Jesus himself, who remain faithful to the mission even when the road is full of deep potholes that must be traversed, and who remember that the good news

isn't just about words but about lives transformed by the compassionate presence of God with us. In that light, Matthew 9 & 10 become not only accounts of ancient events but a living request to continue to participate in a love story of mercy, movement, and belonging that continues to enrich the places and spaces wherever Christ's church dares to walk in response to God's received love, grace and mercy. Amen

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Let us pray:

Gracious God, through the clarity of your servant Matthew's words you move with compassion for the hurting, healing, and sending of your people. Bless refugees during Refugee Week, grant them shelter, courage, welcome, and justice. Inspire us to continue to work toward your harvest of the many even though we are the few in our twilight years and the light grows dim to mend broken borders, as we faithfully follow Christ in mercy, joy, love and steadfast hope. In the name of the risen Christ, we say Amen.