



STUDY 2

Action Réfugiés Montréal

by Paul Clarke, former Executive Director of Action Réfugiés Montréal

"...For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth."

I King 17: 14 (NRSV)

Responsive Opening Prayer:

One: We come to worship God,

All: God is just. God is compassionate. God is love.

One: Where will we find God?

All: God is among the hungry and the thirsty; God is the stranger and the person needing clothes; God is among people who are sick or in prison.

One: How can we serve God?

All: Give food to the hungry and water to the thirsty; welcome the stranger and clothe the naked; visit people who are sick and in prison.

One: Let us seek God so that we can serve God.

All: God is just. God is compassionate. God is love.

One: Now let us worship God.

Hymn: #635 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

Scripture: 1 Kings 17 (whole chapter)

Reflection:

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Today we read the story of the widow at Zarephath. She has very little. She does not think she can share. She does though, and somehow there is enough food. If that was the whole story, we would expect the reading to be matched with the story of the loaves and fishes.

But we carry on with the telling, and it becomes a story about death. “What do you have against me, man of God?” she rails. Have any of us reacted like this to a job loss, an illness, a sundering of a relationship? So many of us have asked God: what do you have against me?

But God’s prophet says death is not the last word. We hear the command, “Let this boy’s life return to him.” He concludes with, “Your son is alive.”

We see in these events that God has come to help his people - people discouraged, people who have suffered loss through no fault of their own, people looking for answers and for hope.

Of course, people living these experiences still exist today in our world. There are people dying, people whose homes are destroyed, those who are exiled. Their old lives are dead even if they aren’t. Often, there are prematurely dead members of their families. They may well ask of God, “What do you have against me?”

We are speaking, of course, of refugees. Refugees often come to Canada to be rid of their old life. It is hard to imagine what it’s like to have so little hope, so little vitality in your own life

that you would want to walk away, run away, fly away from it! We, who are here in Canada, can help bring them back to life.

Action Réfugiés Montréal greeted a sponsored man who had waited seven years for his file to be processed. It seemed like life was dead. He could not go home. Somehow, he had a new wife, a new child since life carried on despite 7 years of waiting in exile. We hear of Moses and 40 years. This man waited 7 years to come.

People in immigration detention ask the staff of Action Réfugiés Montréal who they work for? They ask, “Why are we visiting them in a detention centre? Why do you care? Who is paying?” We tell them that people in churches care about them, even if they have not yet met them. People in churches want to visit them. They think it is important that someone visits them to give them a phone card so they can call home, to get papers, to hear the voice of someone they love and who loves them.

Our presence says: Your new life is important to us. We have heard that Jesus came to bring life. We want to help them try to get their life back. We can try to give their lives back, to bring hope which everyone of us needs.

We have all suffered loss. Each of us knows death. In today’s readings, we hear of God acting through chosen people to bring life - to bring people dead, or past hope, back to the land of the living, “Let this boy’s life return to him.”

You and I are God’s chosen people of the 21st century. Our role is to bring hope and bring peoples’ lives back to them.

Questions:

1. When refugees arrive in Canada, they begin anew, as if a new life has been given. In what ways does life begin anew?
2. People have left behind their old life, their former country, unwillingly. How can we help them keep some of their old country alive here in Canada?

Hymn: #709 – What does the Lord require of you

Closing Prayer:

One: God of love,
through Jesus Christ you bring hope and transformation into the world:
you turn war into peace, distress into calm, indifference into caring, and hatred into love.

God of the wilderness,
make your presence known to people fleeing for their lives, to those in refugee camps and awaiting interviews to determine if they might resettle in Canada or another country, to those who are waiting for travel plans, and to those detained in jail-like facilities because they are asylum seekers.

All: Lord hear our prayer, and in your love answer.

One: God of abundant life,
send your transforming grace to people who are hungry, in Canada or overseas, who live with the stress and exclusion caused by poverty,
and who call out for your love and compassion.

All: Lord hear our prayer, and in your love answer.

One: God of right relationships,
send your transforming grace to people in need of healing - who are suffering from illness and pain, abusive relationships or racism, or who feel lonely, isolated, or scared and cry out for your healing touch.

All: Lord hear our prayer, and in your love answer.

One: God of new beginnings,
send your transforming grace into all places and communities in the world torn apart by war and violence and poverty, to places where people cry out for your justice, freedom and peace – places like Syria, Somalia, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Burundi, Eritrea, Haiti, Ethiopia.

All: Lord hear our prayer, and in your love answer.

Amen.