

## **SERMON 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022**

### **Refugee Sunday**

#### **SERMON: "Welcome In Christ's Name"**

**by Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai**

Three months ago you welcomed me into your midst. You have shared yourselves; opened your homes to me, but more than this - much more - we have offered the cup of cold water, and blessed and strengthened one another when we had need. Today is Refugee Sunday an opportunity for us to acknowledge the refugee in our midst. The number of refugees and displaced people globally is growing. More than 82.4 million people have fled their homes due to war, persecution or terror. People from Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria, Ukraine and other places need resources to access basic human rights.

Today's gospel speaks eloquently of welcome: Jesus tells the disciples as he sends them out to announce the coming of the kingdom with acts and deeds and speech. He tells them and he tells us today:

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me also welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet, just because that person is a prophet, will be given the same reward as a prophet. Anyone who welcomes a good person, just because that person is good, will be

given the same reward as a good person. And anyone who gives one of my most humble followers a cup of cool water, just because that person is my follower, will surely be rewarded.

We are called to give. Called to give welcome. Called to give to God. And called to give as God gives.

So, we who worship and serve here, already know that God calls us, calls us to self-giving love, calls us to welcome as a sign of that love.

And whoever ... gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.

I once read about a woman whose church group bought Christmas gifts for a missionary family.

After meticulously selecting the presents based on the family's needs, sizes and ages, the group gathered to pack them. That's when another member whisked in and plopped an almost new man's coat on the table. Her husband didn't like the style. As she turned to go, she suggested that maybe one of the missionaries could use it. Several people were offended. The coat wouldn't fit anyone in the missionary family. Obviously, the woman hadn't given much thought or time to the project.

But the other presents didn't completely fill the barrel they were packing. So someone folded the coat and stuck it in. It made perfect packing material.

After Christmas, a thank you letter arrived from the missionary family. They thanked the church for their many gifts – and especially for the "miracle" gift.

It seems that, during a storm, a destitute man knocked on their door. He was so ill-dressed for the cold; they invited him to stay until the storm had passed. Even though their visitor would have no gifts in the barrel, they decided to open it. That's when they discovered the coat. It fit the man perfectly.

Do such things really happen in this world? Sure does, all the time!

You never know when you give that cup of cold water - that unneeded coat -

How that gift may be used by God.

NO GIFT GIVEN - NO WELCOME - IS EVER GIVEN IN VAIN. Jesus said,

*And whoever ... gives to one of these little ones even a cup of Cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his Reward.*

Some people are afraid to give their money, their time, their talent, their Life to God because they think they will lose what they give.

Perhaps they do not understand God's economy! They do not understand that God works differently, that God's ways are not our ways. I grew up in a family that was always giving; we gave for funerals for people I don't believe I ever met. There was always someone dying from such and such a family. If someone in the church family died then the choir would collect \$20 from everyone in the choir, the autalavou would do the same, the women's fellowship would also collect about \$20 from all the women, the youth would also give a gift and the Sunday school teachers would also give so theoretically from everyone we would be giving about \$100 in total per person for the bereaved family and when you have a family that consists of mother, father,

and several siblings who are actively involved in the same church although \$20 may seem small for each group, the families were actually giving at least \$500 per family for the same funeral. Then we had the family gifts that we took separately to the bereaved family which amounted to \$200 minimum, so that's about \$700 from the weekly budget. There is no such thing as freewill in Samoan culture.

There is no such thing as freewill, where it does exist communities like this community of St. Andrew's are formed. Samoan's here in the NZ diaspora come from organized and structured pseudo Samoan villages within their church fellowships. One knows what their role and place within village and church structure is. Therefore, we do not question or challenge the authority of the leaders of these churches. The protocol of the village, the protocol of the culture is the protocol of the church.

For me, I have learnt that it is giving that we receive, it may not be monetary, but the blessings are tenfold. Some of the wealthiest, richest people in the world are the saddest and loneliest, whereas some of the poorest people in the world are the happiest and blessed.

Our baptisms and confirmations remind us that we are called in covenant to a commitment to compassion and love in sharing and caring for one another, to be a welcoming community, to offer one another a cup of cool water.

Practice on each other the welcome and the hospitality that you

offer from your own homes and families. Be genuinely concerned about each other's welfare. Soon you will find yourselves welcoming Christ in

newcomers and strangers as well. For the word will spread that - in this place - a home, a family, God's people are to be found.

**Invite Paul Franken**

**Ben Gray to share their short stories.**

I worked at Newtown Union Health Service for 27 years. Very early on we recognised that the refugees arriving in Wellington were not getting good primary care. We negotiated for some extra funding and set up a care team. At the time the usual practice was to use anyone you could find to help with interpreting. This was pretty bad for most patients who had English as a second language but it was hopeless in caring for refugees who on arrival often had multiple interrelated health problems. We initiated the development of interpreter services in Wellington by training some lay interpreters through the Multicultural Resource Centre. This has grown into the very successful organisation Interpreting New Zealand that now provides professional interpreters in over 70 languages. We had to learn from our patients and the interpreters how to conduct a consultation in two languages. I later moved to the University, did research around how to work effectively with interpreters and have published multiple academic papers and guidelines. I am enormously grateful to my refugee patients for having taught me so much.

By definition refugees have had life experiences that are nothing like my life experiences. All have come from some form of refugee accommodation having fled their homeland. Many have experienced war and some have experienced torture and trauma. They worry for the family that they have left behind or who

have ended up in other parts of the world. I feel hugely privileged to be able to share their lives and be with them as they adjusted to their new environment. The troubles that some of them have faced, survived and grown from are much more challenging than anything that I have faced, and put my trivial stresses and strains into perspective. The exposure to so many different cultures and ways of seeing the world has been instrumental in my developing a humility around the way I think people should live. My way of living is not “right” it is just one of many ways of living. I have learned that the language that you speak changes the way in which you see the world. There is no such thing as a “black box” that can accurately turn one language into another. For example not only is there no Somali word for schizophrenia but their whole understanding of what we call Mental Illness is based on totally different concepts.

Many people in New Zealand do not have the opportunity to get to know refugees and as was highlighted by the Royal Commission into the Mosque shootings we have a problem of achieving social inclusion for these people. More work needs to be done but I am proud of the fact that University of Otago has a preferential entry system into medical school for people from a refugee background. Many refugees in New Zealand are very grateful for the opportunity of a safe life that they have been gifted and work very hard to build and support New Zealand society. Ibrahim Omer is the second refugee MP (after Golriz Ghahraman) He was a patient of mine at Newtown Union Health Service.

We have an obligation as international citizens to take some of the millions of refugees into our country, but more importantly I believe that our country is enriched by their presence. Ngā mihi, Ben.

Remember the need of God's grace, the need of forgiveness, the need of compassion, the need of loneliness that we have experienced.

Remember how God, through this community, through this family, meets those needs.

Receive these gifts, this hospitality, and this welcome. They are signs of God's favour and bring healing and wholeness. Let ourselves occasionally be the cherished guest, for Christ's sake and in his name.

Yes, it costs. Our lives will be interrupted. Our privacy occasionally invaded. Our nerves frayed. Our patience tried. Yet, what we give up - our self-interested agendas - we will discover to have been really heavy burdens that we have been dragging around.

The world is sore in need of smiles, is crying out for small acts of kindness, desperately longs for cups of cold water. Will you make God's House a Home? Will you give yourself to God in Christ's name? God longs to hear our answer.