

Bedefolder, Evangelisk Alliance

All Bible references from The Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ® by Biblica, Inc. ®.

Theme: Journeying – as Pilgrims, Foreigners and Refugees.

1. Abraham. A Pilgrim to Follow

Heb 11,8-14

God promised Abraham that He would bless all the peoples of the earth through him and his descendants. But in order for this to happen, Abraham had to *leave*: “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12,1).

Abraham is known for his obedience and especially as an *example of faith*. God called him to leave all that was well-known and familiar: Friends, family, and his whole network that meant security, wealth, and peace. Abraham follows the call, leaves and journeys to an unknown place. His faith in God’s promise transforms him into a *pilgrim*.

Abraham is an example for us as Christians: We must also be open to God’s calling. We must also sometimes let go of all the comforts that bind us. Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness (Rom. 4,22), just as our faith in Christ is credited to us as righteousness. By grace we have been saved through faith (Eph. 2,8-9).

We thank you, God, because you faithfully walk with us every day on our journey as pilgrims.

We confess that we are often stuck in what is well-known, comfortable and secure.

We pray that you will bless us to bless others.

We pray for the Church’s work with children and youth, that you would send role-models of faith to children and youth.

2. Joseph. A Foreigner Brings Blessings

Acts 7,9-15 (Gen 37-50)

Joseph was sold as a slave by his jealous brothers and ended up in Egypt. There he was vulnerable and exposed. As a foreigner he could not defend himself from the unjust accusations from Potiphar's wife. He was thrown in jail, left to die.

But Joseph was also under God's care. God freed Joseph, and used him to bless both his own family and the people of Egypt.

Sadly, not all refugee stories have such a happy ending. All too often it ends in evil, exploitation, and death. As children of God we should therefore share in God's desire to "defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow, love the foreigner residing among you and give them food and clothing" (Deut 10,18).

Let us comfort ourselves and others with God's promise that He is with us always, and no one can separate us from His love in Christ Jesus.

We thank you, God, because you are Lord of History and know the future.

We confess that we are unable to always have compassion and care for others.

We pray for peace where there war, so displaced people freely can return home.

We pray for refugees, vulnerable, and exposed people.

3. Stephen is stoned. And the gospel spreads.

Acts 8,1-4

Many people came to faith in Jerusalem. There were signs and wonders, and the church expanded rapidly. It seems as if all the Christians were so engaged in the revival that the gospel didn't spread past the city wall.

The death of a martyr and persecution of the Church leads to God's plan being carried out. Everyone is now scattered as refugees throughout all of Judea and Samaria – and they "preached the word wherever they went". The persecution actually becomes the beginning of the spread of the gospel also in Judea and Samaria. Exactly as Jesus had told his disciples earlier (Acts 1,8).

We must be cautious when trying to decipher the unfathomable ways of God. Yet the story shows us that God can use both evil and unwanted events to spread the gospel. Just like church history shows us that the gospel often has been sown during oppression and pain.

We thank you, God, because you see and know every person's situation.

We confess that we can be overcome by gloom and feel that you have forgotten the world and its needs.

We pray for willingness to follow your ways and endure oppression for the sake of your name.

We pray for all Christians who are persecuted because of their faith in You.

4. Jonah. Compassion for a Foreign People.

Jonah 3,10-4,11

After Jonah in vain fled from God's calling, he travelled to Nineveh in order to call the ungodly city to repentance. And they repented to such an extent that God regretted the calamity Jonah had preached.

The prophet was not happy with this. He built himself a shelter with a view over the city. There he sat and waited, hoping that God would regret his mercy and punish the city.

Meanwhile God made a leafy plant grow to shade and cool the shelter for the moody prophet. But the following night God provided a worm which chewed the plant so it withered, and the sun shone unmercifully upon Jonah. Angry and depressed he only wished to die. But God makes it clear for Jonah that he is more concerned with his own disappointment and sunburn than with the thousands of people who needed God's forgiveness and care. Jonah had become self-absorbed instead of compassionate towards the world's great cities and countries.

As Christians we live by the power of forgiveness, and we must pray that it transforms us from judgmental to compassionate people. God desires that all people are saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2,4).

We thank you, God, because your grace is sufficient for us.

We confess that we forget that we cannot earn salvation by ourselves, and that we compare our lives and deeds with those of others in order to exalt ourselves.

We pray that the Church – both at home and abroad – will lead people to the salvation in Jesus.

We pray for all ministers, missionaries and evangelists who have been called to preach in the Church and society.

5. Paul. Citizen of Rome and Heaven

Phil 1,21-26

In these verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians we encounter Paul's personal reflections about whether he should hold on to life or surrender to death. Like all Christians, Paul is characterised by a dual affiliation – his Roman citizenship in this world, and his "citizenship in heaven" (Phil 3,20).

Paul talks of death as gain. To be in the world is for Paul a temporary state on the road towards eternity. Only after death will we experience to be "with Christ" – in a new and complete sense.

At the same time Paul is already living in a close relationship with Christ in this world. And if his life can bear fruit, exalt and serve Christ, he is ready to keep on living here.

A yearning for heaven has at times made Christians de-emphasize that there also is a life *before* death. At other times Christians have downplayed that death is "gain" and not the end of it all. For Paul both citizenships are connected through Christ: "*Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*" (Rom 14,8).

We thank you, God, because death cannot separate us from your love and our communion with you.

We confess that we often find it hard to see death as "gain".

We pray for joy in this life –and joy in anticipation of the eternal life.

We pray for all who are sick or living with a disability. Help us to fill their need for community.

6. Journeying. As a Pilgrim at Home

Mark 5,14-20

Pilgrims and refugees have one thing in common: They are on the move, often over great distances. During this week we have heard how God can use the journey to bring people in contact with the gospel. But you can also be journeying even though you stay at home.

The demon-possessed man in the land of the Gerasenes experienced how Jesus had power to drive out all his cruel, tormenting demons. And the man who had been possessed was immediately ready for departure and asked to go with Jesus. But he received the answer: *“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you”*.

Many people experience a call to go abroad with the gospel. But it is an equally great calling to share the gospel with your family and hometown, where it can be extra challenging to be a witness. Because in your hometown everyone knows you well. Including your weaknesses.

We thank you God, because you walk with us the whole journey.

We confess that it can be difficult to share the gospel with those closest to us.

We pray that those who are your disciples in their places of work will spread hope and love. Bless them to be a light for you.

We pray for all who are lonely and feel like they are “journeying” alone. Be near them and send people along with them on their journey.

7. Priscilla and Aquila. Exiles and Examples

Acts 18,1-4

Aquila and his wife Priscilla had been forced to leave when Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. Now they lived in exile in Corinth, where they showed hospitality and opened their home to the apostle Paul. He lived with them, and they worked together as tentmakers.

Priscilla and Aquila became the cornerstone of the large church in Corinth. And the couple's hospitality continued when they later returned to Rome. There a whole congregation met in their home.

In his letter to the Romans Paul refers to this missionary couple with great fondness, and he describes them as *"my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them"* (Rom 16,3-4).

God still uses migration, voluntary or forced, to extend His church. Many ordinary Christians deliberately seek employment in countries where the Church is hard-pressed. Like Paul they use their free time to spread the gospel – often called "tent making mission". Let us all, wherever we may be, dedicate our homes, our time and service, and our brotherly affection, to building the Kingdom of God.

We thank you, God, because you have opened the door and shown us hospitality and love.

We confess that we far too often have closed our doors and our hearts to people in need.

We pray for all congregations and churches that have opened their doors to migrants in our country.

We pray for politicians and governments in Europe. Help them to safeguard the freedom of faith, and build bridges between religious, social and ethnic groups.

8. Jesus. Our Refuge in Life and Death

John 14,1-6

Matthew tells us that Jesus started his life as a refugee in Egypt. Most likely their escape and life in a foreign country cost Joseph and Mary all the gold, frankincense and myrrh that they had just received.

Just like refugees today often pay with all they have to bring their family to safety.

As an adult Jesus was pursued again, this time by the Jewish leaders. He is always on the move to such an extent that he says that *"the Son of Man has no place to lay his head"*.

Christ walked the way of humiliation. He humbled himself, took the form of a servant, and became obedient to death – in order to save us (Phil 2,6ff). The goal of Jesus' journey was the cross, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem, where salvation was won for all people. On the way there he had compassion with the large crowds – and also made time for individuals in need.

Jesus also has compassion today with large crowds in need. And with individuals. As a true human, as a refugee, and as a poor man, he knows our weaknesses – and sympathises with us when we approach the throne of grace (Heb 4,15-16).

We thank you, God, because the way of humiliation became the way of victory.

We confess that we often forget the enormity of the sacrifice you made for the sake of our salvation.

We pray that you will help us forgive our enemies and persecutors – as you have forgiven us.

We pray that your Church will be united and not divided through faith in Christ. Help us to see ourselves as a part of your Church every day and in all of life's situations.