

Readings for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

28th June 2026

First Reading: Jeremiah 28:5-9

The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord, and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfil the words that you have prophesied and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord and all the exiles. But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Second Reading: Romans 6:12-23

Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel: St Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus said to the twelve: 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

A Reflection for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

As Bishop Mark will be preaching at our services this weekend, I offer a short reflection here for those unable to attend in person and any others who wish to read it.

Last week, I wrote and spoke about how, as Christians, we are called to account for the way we live our lives, and in particular how we respond to the apparently increasing violence on our streets and a rhetoric that seeks to apportion blame to others, often those who are different in some way. In a graphic illustration of that point, after I wrote that reflection, though before I preached last Sunday, our news screens showed pictures of a man running through the streets of Edinburgh attempting to murder people in an alleged anti-Muslim attack.

Whilst thinking about that, I read an article in last week's *Church Times* by Jenny Herrera entitled *Asylum-seekers are not a problem to be solved*. In it, she pointed out that current tensions about immigration, tensions that I would add also lead to uncertainty and fear for people from ethnic minorities who are British and have been for generations, are being fuelled by political debate and the media. As a result, refugees and asylum seekers are seen as problem to be solved when in reality they are human beings who have fled war, persecution or violence, and have endured dangerous journeys, often arriving deeply traumatised and fearful. They are often portrayed as coming only to receive financial support, yet many are legally restricted from working although the majority wish to rebuild their lives and contribute to society.

Our Gospel today is about welcome. It reminds us that in welcoming others, we welcome Christ. Throughout the Bible, Christians are called to welcome the stranger and care for the vulnerable. In her article, Jenny Herrera describes some examples of churches reaching out to welcome and support refugees and immigrants as they rebuild their lives. Some churches have major support programmes, but often such support is in small ways: small acts of kindness, a gift of something that can't otherwise be afforded, actions that show people they are seen and cared for, actions that restore dignity and hope.

Herrera also points out that the safety and peace that we enjoy in this country are gifts from God, not rights that we have earned. These are gifts that I believe we are called to share, as we extend Christ's welcome to others. Herrera goes on to say:

In doing so [welcoming the stranger], we not only reflect Christ's love, but also demonstrate to wider society that refugees are people to be supported and valued. Behind every headline are people made in the image of God, bringing gifts, resilience and experiences that can enrich our ... communities.

We may not have large refugee communities in this area, but every community has people who feel marginalised or excluded in some way, who struggle to make ends meet, who feel 'different' and uncared for, who need the hand of welcome extended to them. We are called to pay attention, to welcome them, to share Christ's love.

But we are also called to pay attention to the bigger picture. We are called to challenge, wherever we encounter it, a simplistic narrative that sees refugees and migrants as the problem lying behind the ills of society, and to see the human being, the image of God, in the refugee and migrant. And then there are underlying causes that lead people to flee their homes in the first place – the conflicts, the persecution and violence, the economic injustices of our world, the devastating effects of climate change that are more than the heatwaves seen in other parts of this country in recent days. We are called to challenge these too – how on earth are we to make a difference there?

After the incident in Edinburgh and then Jenny Herrera's article, a third thing that happened was that a campaign was drawn to my attention separately by two people, within minutes of each other. It is the Just Peace Coalition which brings together churches and Christian organisations in a campaign called 'Time to Act' which is committed to working and praying for a just peace for all who call the Holy Land home. As part of this campaign, individuals can lend their support in various ways, including by calling on our MPs to press the government to do more to ensure that law is upheld in that land, particularly for Palestinians being evicted from their homes. It is part of what will be necessary to bring about peace in the Middle East. You can find out more here: <https://justpeacecoalition.com/>

This is just one possibility among many of how we can begin to make a difference on a wider scale. The way each of us responds is unique to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. What we must not do is ignore the difficulties of our society and the world. As Christians, we illuminate those difficulties with Christ's love and forgiveness as we heed the call of Jesus to extend the hand of welcome to others of whatever background.