

## **Let Us Plant Seeds of Hope**

Mark 4:26-34, Refugee Sunday, 16 June 2024

I am deeply troubled by the way some Christians and churches perpetuate the oppression of poor people under the guise of helping them. Instead of providing genuine assistance, we often reduce the poor to passive recipients of our discarded items—clothing and other materials we no longer use or want. This practice, which is falsely celebrated as charitable recycling, is nothing more than a dehumanizing act that leaves the poor waiting for the crumbs from our tables. Such actions are not acts of help but rather instances of further marginalization. True assistance should aim to restore dignity and provide meaningful support like skills training, empowerment and advocacy for systemic change, rather than patting ourselves on the back for offloading our unwanted goods.

In the Bible, Cheerful giving, as described in 2 Corinthians 9, means giving willingly and joyfully, not because we have surplus or because we no longer use certain things. In Genesis 4, Abel's offering was accepted by God because he offered the best portions of the firstborn of his flock with sincerity and faith. Abel's act of giving reflected his deep commitment and genuine relationship with God, highlighting the importance of the quality and heartfelt intent behind one's offerings.

As a poor person from the Global South and a refugee myself, I express this on Refugee Sunday with the hope that our efforts genuinely reflect compassion, dignity, and meaningful support for all refugees.

The United Nations declared World Refugee Day to raise awareness about the plight of refugees worldwide and to honor their strength, courage, and resilience observed annually on the 20th of June.

The UNHCR estimates over 26 million refugees globally, alongside approximately 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including IDPs and asylum seekers. Displacement stems from varied and complex factors such as armed conflicts, persecution, violence, human rights abuses, climate change-induced disasters, and economic hardships. In Germany, recent reports indicate about 1.8 million recognized refugees and asylum seekers from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, and several African nations.

The journey of refugees mirrors the Gospel message in Mark 4:26-34, where Jesus uses the Parable of the Growing Seed and the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Like the mustard seed, refugees start anew with hope and resilience despite facing immense challenges. They have the potential to flourish and enrich their host communities, akin to the mustard seed growing into a large plant that provides shelter. This parallels Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, where small beginnings lead to significant impacts, quietly and mysteriously unfolding like the growth of the seed. For example, one of our

language teachers in Hamburg is an African refugee, illustrating the transformative potential refugees bring to their new environments.

The church's ministry to refugees can be likened to the mustard seed in many ways. Initiatives often start small, with outreach programs, support groups, or community meals—such as a dignified Kleiderkammer. These efforts, undertaken with the intent of pastorally journeying with refugees, can grow into comprehensive support networks that profoundly impact lives. Just as the mustard seed grows into a large plant, the church's efforts can transform refugees' lives, providing essential resources, community, and spiritual support. By ministering to refugees, the church builds God's Kingdom on earth, embodying justice, compassion, and hospitality.

Our congregation at St. Catherine's embodies Jesus' teachings through our ministry to refugees. Like mustard seeds, refugees start small and can flourish, while our modest efforts grow into impactful ministries that reflect God's Kingdom. By participating in this ministry, we follow Jesus's example of welcoming and caring for the marginalized, putting our faith into action to provide essential support and demonstrate God's transformative love. Let's reflect on refugees' challenges and consider how each of us can contribute—whether through volunteering, donating resources, advocating for refugee rights, or offering a welcoming hand and ear. Together, let's embody Jesus' compassion and hospitality, ensuring every refugee feels valued and supported in rebuilding their lives."

Engaging in this ministry allows us to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world. When we offer a helping hand to refugees, we are responding to Jesus' call to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Our efforts, no matter how small they may seem, can grow and bear fruit, just as the mustard seed grows into a large plant that provides shelter. By working together, we can create a supportive community that nurtures and empowers refugees, helping them to rebuild their lives and contribute to our shared future.

Participating in this ministry strengthens our faith and community by deepening our understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and fostering empathy and compassion. Through collective efforts, we witness the transformative power of God's love, grow spiritually, and unite in our commitment to the Gospel. Every act of kindness builds a more just and compassionate world. Remember Jesus' words, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

By embracing this ministry, we not only change the lives of those we help but also deepen our own faith journey. Let us seize this opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the Gospel and to be instruments of God's peace and love. In doing so, we fulfill our mission as followers of Christ, making a lasting impact on the world and bringing glory to God. Let us plant these seeds of hope and watch as they grow into a flourishing testament to God's grace, mercy and justice. Amen.