



# UPROOTED AND OVERLOOKED

## Order of Service

### Call to worship

'Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.'  
James 4:8

### Approach

In abandoned and ignored places

#### **The creator dwells.**

In neglected and disregarded causes

#### **The son is near.**

In uprooted and overlooked lives

#### **The spirit abides.**

In our gathered time of worship

#### **God meets us here.**

### Confession

Cornerstone Christ,  
who knows what it is to be rejected,  
abandoned and despised,  
we bring to you now our prayers of confession.

In your mercy

#### **Hear our prayer.**

For the times when we have ignored,  
overlooked or neglected the plight of others  
because of the fear of our own discomfort

#### **Christ, forgive us.**

For the times when we have satisfied  
our own needs for security and safety  
without considering including others

#### **Christ, forgive us.**

For the times when we have avoided  
standing in solidarity with those you love  
who are suffering  
because it would cost us too much

#### **Christ, forgive us.**

For the times the cries of the abandoned,  
the silent fears of the displaced,  
and the secret trauma of those abused  
have gone unheard and unnoticed

#### **Christ, forgive us.**

In your endless mercy,

#### **Hear our prayer.**

### Choice of readings

#### **Old Testament**

Genesis 21: 8-19

Psalms 137

Isaiah 40: 21-31

#### **New Testament**

Mark 1: 40-2:11

### Sermon

## Thanksgiving and Intercession

If we were to give thanks for our blessings,  
to count and name them one by one,  
we would be giving thanks for a very long time.

And for that we give you abundant thanks,  
loving God.

And with this attitude of thankfulness

we bring before you those  
never far from your heart

**So all may be included in the feast of life.**

God of refuge and strength,

We pray for those forced to leave their homes.

Whose strength has been tested by  
displacement,

Whose lives have been uprooted.

We pray for Sori whose community in Kenya  
hasn't seen rain for two years.

Give her the resources to keep her children in  
school.

Give her strength while her husband is away,  
seeking pasture for their livestock.

Give her a sense of home and community amidst  
uncertainty.

We pray that rains will come.

We pray that the pastoralist way of life will  
survive the challenges of climate change.

God who was displaced,

**May your people be ignored no more.**

God of comfort and peace,

We pray for those who were displaced by  
violence,

Whose safety is uncertain and temporary,

Whose grief is felt every day.

We pray for people like Gamara in Iraq who fled  
from fighting in her home town with her three  
children.

Give her comfort in her grief after losing her  
home and her stability.

Give her son Hathan, who is disabled, the

treatment he needs.

Give her hope for her children and their future.

We pray that peace may come to Iraq.

We pray that people will be able to rebuild their  
homes and lives in safety.

God who was displaced,

**May your people be ignored no more.**

God of shelter and love,

We pray for those whose homes and villages  
have become a refuge,

Whose resources are stretched,

Whose communities are struggling.

We pray for people like Ayuba in Nigeria,

Who open their homes to those fleeing  
violence.

Give Ayuba the support he needs as he shelters  
those with nothing.

Give him the strength to keep going in the face  
of so much suffering.

Give him the hope that he will one day be able  
to return to his farm.

We pray that peace will come to Nigeria.

We pray that people are able to return to their  
homes.

God who was displaced,

May your people be ignored no more.

God of action and justice,

We pray for all those hearing these stories of  
displacement,

That our gifts, prayers and actions will make a  
difference,

That we can secure a fair deal for displaced  
people worldwide.

We pray that these stories will raise awareness  
of all those who have been uprooted from their  
homes.

Give us the courage to speak out for those who  
are overlooked.

Give us prompts to pray for everyone on the

move.

Give us opportunities to share these stories and take action.

God who was displaced,

May your people be ignored no more.

## **Blessing and sending out**

Bless us with the eyes to see

Bless us with the ears to hear

Bless us with the hearts to notice

Your Spirit at work in the world

and to join with you there.

**Amen.**

## **Sermon notes**

Many passages and stories in the Bible are difficult and challenging to read – just as many stories of suffering in our world are distressing to hear, read or see. This is one reason why the Bible is such a living and helpful text, revealing the Word of God to help us respond to such challenging times.

Movement of people is nothing new. But today, the forced movement of people across the world has reached unprecedented levels. This movement is not only across borders, but also within them. Out of the 65 million people forced from their homes by war, conflicts and persecution, nearly two-thirds are displaced within their own countries. Theirs is the often unheard or overlooked story of migration, a story in which those affected cannot access the help available to refugees.

The following notes are suggestions for a sermon to accompany our Uprooted exhibition and campaign highlighting the plight of displaced people. We've suggested a variety of passages to stimulate your thinking about this urgent issue, and from which to choose the most appropriate for your congregation or context.

## **Old Testament**

### **Hagar's two displacements – Genesis 16 and Genesis 21**

Hagar's first displacement is an escape. We are

told she was but a slave-girl when first given to Abram by a desperate Sarai in order to bear them a child. And while this was a culturally acceptable practice, not surprisingly things get complicated. Hagar's resulting contempt of Sarai when she becomes pregnant is met with Sarai's harshness and so she escapes to the wilderness. And the Lord meets her there. It takes an angel of the Lord appearing to persuade her to return to the complicated misery of Sarai and Abram's childless home.

We next meet Hagar after Sarah has also borne Abraham a son (their names had been changed by God). Seeing Isaac and Ishmael play together sparks

Sarah's fears that her son will be denied the fullness of his inheritance. Raising her concerns with Abraham causes him much distress since he realises it will lead to him sacrificing his first-born son from the family home. With the reassurance of God's provision, he sends Hagar out into the wilderness yet again. This time Hagar's displacement is by force.

She wanders in the wilderness. Hagar does not find a spring of water as before and instead she is distressed at the inevitable death of her child. God hears her cries and meets her there, providing not just reassurance of their future but also the practical provision of water for her boy.

The giving of a slave girl to bear a child may have been an acceptable cultural practice of the day but it still echoes the sexual exploitation of girls and women by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

As with Hagar's second displacement, those who have fled the terror of Boko Haram are often left without the resources their families need. Falmata Bulama and her children Yagana and Bakuva fled and are now forced to live in a makeshift community just outside Maiduguri, the biggest town in Nigeria's Borno state. The conditions are appalling.

In both instances of her displacement Hagar is not abandoned by God, who takes care of her and her child in the wilderness. God hears the cries of those who are displaced and meets them there.

When people become displaced, it's the poorest who are the most vulnerable. People like Ahmed in Iraq, who after fleeing from the forces of the so-called Islamic State can now earn money

through a community project run by a Christian Aid partner.

## **The experience of exile – Isaiah 40: 21-31 or Psalm 137**

Many passages or books from the Old Testament could be chosen to highlight experience of exile in the 6th Century BC. The fact that so much of the Old Testament is given over to such occurrences and their effects emphasises the devastation of being displaced for the people of God. The spiritual, social, physical, psychological and economic consequences of forced movement are recounted through much of the Old Testament.

Isaiah 40:27 highlights the sense they had of feeling abandoned or overlooked by God: 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'.

The writer goes to lengths to reassure them that despite how they feel they are not abandoned, that God will give strength to their weary bodies and despite the exhaustion they feel now they shall be renewed and revived.

Psalm 137 gives full vent to the grief and desire for vengeance that violent displacement evokes. It makes for harrowing reading and is perhaps one of the less cited psalms in Sunday morning worship, particularly when there are children present. But nevertheless, the reality of displacement, of the violence feared or realised, is such that human outcry and lament are warranted and needed. This is a cathartic expression of the devastation and loss experienced.

And those familiar words that begin Psalm 137: 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and we wept when we remembered Zion', could so easily be uttered by the 60 million and more who are displaced today. 'By the rivers of Lebanon, we sat down and we wept when we remembered Syria.'

But for those displaced in Kenya by drought, likely to have been made worse by climate change, there are few rivers to sit by to shed such tears:

Sori Galgallo lives in Marsabit County, which hasn't seen rainfall for two years. She's committed to putting her children through school, as she believes their future is stronger with an education. Seeing what the drought has done to her community, she believes the traditional pastoralist way of life is no longer sustainable. Family members are helping her cover the school fees and Christian Aid's

partner PACIDA has given her money which she uses to keep her children learning.

## **New Testament**

Throughout the New Testament we encounter story after story of Jesus including the excluded and making it possible for them to live well. You may have many others encounters that come to mind beyond the two that we draw on here, from the first two chapters of the Gospel of Mark.

Our sisters and brothers who have been displaced in their own countries are currently excluded from the United Nations' global agreements on refugees and migrants. Christian Aid's Uprooted and Overlooked campaign is calling for them to be included, so that more than 40 million people in great need will no longer be ignored and forgotten.

### **Mark 1: 40-2:12**

Two very different examples of Jesus including the excluded and ignored. – one very private and the other very public:

A leper approaches Jesus. Regarded as unclean, he is ostracised from society in every way possible. Who knows when he was last touched because of his condition? It is with faith and courage that he comes to Jesus, presenting him with a choice. Jesus is 'moved with pity' or in some translations he is 'moved with anger' and does the unthinkable. He touches him and heals him. The touch of including, valuing and instilling dignity – equally healing acts.

And it is probably the healed leper's fault that in the next scene we have standing room only in a home in Capernaum. To that home arrives a group of friends with one they love on a mat who is paralysed. But they can't get near Jesus because of the crowds clustering round him in the room, so undeterred they find another way – through the roof!

It's the miracle Seamus Heaney writes about in his poem of the same name. The tenacious dedication of seeing their friend made well, restored and no longer excluded because of his condition or the religious judgement that came with it. And Jesus does more than heal him physically; he also heals him from the social and religious stigma associated with his condition, declaring him as 'Son' and a

forgiven one at that. Imagine the spring in this man's step as he picks up his mat and leaves!

Jesus' radical willingness to include is matched by the determination of the friends to get through to him. Christian Aid's campaigners and activists show a similar tenacity in their efforts to ensure that no one is left behind or left out from a full and flourishing life.

And we find determination and willingness to include in another very crowded house, this time in Nigeria. Ayuba Azagwu was one of the first to flee his village, so was able to find a property in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria.

Ayuba has opened up his home to those who've fled violence. Although his house has only nine rooms, he's sheltered up to 100 people. Many are from Ayuba's home village and like him they've fled the destruction Boko Haram brought and arrived in Maiduguri with nothing.

Ayuba is losing rent money, but he feels obliged to help. He told us: 'They have no one else to help them but me.' He's not sure if he'll ever get back to his farm and his old life.

May the tenacity of the friends, the generosity and hospitality of Ayuba, and the healing, including the touch of our loving Lord Jesus be the inspiration that we need to raise our voices and ensure no one who is displaced from their home is ignored.

## Prayer Points

### Nigeria

Please pray for:

- ★ all those affected by violence.
- ★ women at risk of being kidnapped and men at risk of being murdered if they refuse to co-operate with Boko Haram.
- ★ those living in camps with few resources and inadequate shelter.
- ★ those in host communities whose already meagre resources are stretched.
- ★ Christian Aid's partners supporting displaced people and host communities with food and hygiene packages.
- ★ a lasting peace and that people will be able to return to their homes.

### Kenya

Please pray for:

- ★ all those affected by drought and whose livestock are dying, leaving them with no livelihood.
- ★ all those on the move in search of pasture.
- ★ women and children having to live where they can be reached with emergency water supplies.
- ★ men who have to take livestock away for months in search of good pastures, deprived of their families.
- ★ children whose schooling is interrupted by displacement and poverty.
- ★ Christian Aid's partners who organise emergency support for families.
- ★ international action on climate change to help protect those living on the front line of changing weather patterns.

### Iraq

Please pray for:

- ★ all those who have fled violence in the region: refugees from Syria and people from within Iraq.
- ★ everyone in Iraq whose daily lives are overshadowed by war and suffering.
- ★ all those grieving for family and friends who were killed.
- ★ all those with missing family members.
- ★ all those living in camps and in host communities, in temporary homes and shelters.
- ★ host communities struggling to support displaced people and refugees, that their resources will be enough for their families and those they're helping.
- ★ Christian Aid partners giving out emergency supplies and giving people long-term support to rebuild their lives.

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