

Methodists for World Mission

***‘Moving People: Moving Stories’
2nd-4th June 2017***



**Inderjit Bhogal Bible Studies:
A God of Sanctuary**

An Introduction to the City of Sanctuary movement

18th June 2017 marks the tenth anniversary of Sheffield being declared as the first UK City of Sanctuary by the Lord Mayor of Sheffield. Founded in 2005, in Sheffield a movement began that has spread across the country - by April 2017 there were over 100 Cities/Towns/Boroughs/Areas in Britain and Ireland working with the City of Sanctuary vision, to “build cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety”. This vision is spreading to other parts of Europe and beyond – it has been described as “a movement within a wider movement”, networking with numerous faith based and community organisations working with refugees.

The City of Sanctuary is “a movement of local people and community groups across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland committed to creating a culture of welcome and safety, especially for refugees seeking sanctuary from wars and persecution.

Wherever refugees go we want them to feel safe and find people who welcome them, support them and include them in their activities, recognise and celebrate what they can contribute and understand why they are here.”

The origins of this growing movement are modest and I did not envisage such a rapid growth when it emerged from an initiative I took. I have lived in Sheffield since 1987 and from my earliest days in my work as a Methodist Minister, I have been associated with key organisations working with refugees in the city. In conversation with others it became clear that if the various organisations formed a network and worked together their contribution to supporting refugees would be greater. In October 2005, with my colleague Craig Barnett, I convened a meeting that led to the launch of the City of Sanctuary initiative.

All forty of the participants at this first meeting agreed that if we collaborated and shared our wisdom, we could work to make a bigger impact on our city and build a culture of welcome, hospitality and safety, especially for asylum seekers and refugees. All the participant organisations signed a pledge of support and then we sought to grow this list to a total of 100 committed organisations, so we could ask our Local Authority to support us to become a declared City of Sanctuary. We set the target of achieving this within 10 years, but within two years we achieved our aims and became the UK’s first City of Sanctuary.

Many others have joined the movement and the issue has only grown in coverage and significance ever since – could you be a part of the next chapter?

Blessings to you and I hope you find this resource helpful,



Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal - <http://inderjitbhogal.co.uk>

Bible Study 1 – Saturday 3rd June

Study Notes: What is Sanctuary?

Introducing Inderjit – a story of movement.

What does the word ‘Sanctuary’ mean to you?

Exodus 25:8 & John 1:14

The existence of God is not up for debate in the Bible. Rather, the question that the Bible wrestles with, and illuminates, is *how* is God with us?

The Bible shows us that God is a Migrant God and a God of a migrant, travelling, people. God chooses to dwell with the people, to take sanctuary among them [Exodus 25:8].

Then this Migrant God takes another journey, a self-emptying journey, to be revealed in human form, incarnate in Christ. This is the heart of the good news: God is revealed in Christ, as a God who comes to us, and is with us in the journey of life.

Look up 3 references to tents and dwelling in the Bible: Exodus 25:8, Matthew 17:1-5, John 1:14.

What do you learn here about the meaning of tents and dwelling?

What does it mean to give Sanctuary to God?

The first one for whom human beings are required to provide sanctuary is God!

The stories surrounding Jesus and the early church, in Luke and Acts, continue the theme of journey, with a key story being the encounter with the risen Christ who meets and walks with his disciples as a “stranger” on the road to Emmaus, and how he was known “in the breaking of the bread” [Luke 24:13-35].

Bible Study 2 – Sunday 4th June

Study Notes: ‘You shall also love the stranger’

Genesis 18:1-18 & Luke 24:13-35. What do you see of hospitality in Rublev’s icon?

What about your experience?

Talk about a time when you were hospitable to a stranger, or a stranger gave you hospitality. When were you in the company of Angels without knowing it?

‘You shall also love the stranger’ – 37 versions of this commandment in the Bible.

- Jesus said to his followers, “whenever you meet in my name have some food and remember me”.
- Jesus used the story of the Good Samaritan to teach us. A stranger shows the hospitality that reflects true faith and Jesus’ instruction is to “Go and do likewise” [Luke 10: 37].
- Jesus cuts through boundaries and separation between who or what is considered clean or unclean, especially by eating with those considered to be the outsiders or social outcasts of his day

There is a promise in scripture that it is through those of a different language that God will speak (Isaiah 28:9-11). What is your experience of this?

What is God saying to us through the stories and voices of those who speak a different language to us?

Take a moment to look at the image of the woman and child...reflect on what you see.

How can you offer sanctuary – in your life, home, community and church?

Becoming a Sanctuary Church (or Group of Churches)

Sanctuary, or hospitality-with-safety, is a long-standing theme of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Now we need Sanctuary Churches who wish to meet and greet new arrivals fleeing from war and hunger.

We need Churches to;

- Develop a welcoming, hospitable, inclusive environment in our churches where strangers feel genuinely welcome even if they're not like us;
- Befriend homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees, people from the travelling communities and all those seeking sanctuary among us, and when appropriate assist them in facing difficulties with the authorities;
- Invite refugees or others seeking safety to come and speak to our congregation, and to attend other events or activities which may meet some of their needs;
- Work at making our worshipping communities really inclusive, with training in appropriate theology and biblical interpretation;
- Commit to wider local initiatives that offer welcome, end hatred & hostility;
- Build cultures and communities in which all are welcome, valued and safe;
- Support organisations and events seeking to offer information and hospitality, such as Refugee Week, and Poverty and Homelessness Sundays;
- Seek to encourage our own village, town or city to become a community of sanctuary, which welcomes all those of different culture or ethnicity.

Individual Christians need to:

- Greet people with a smile, especially those of a different culture;
- Open our homes to "strangers" who seek sanctuary - invite someone around for a meal...go out of your way to welcome, invite them to appropriate activities;
- Be vigilant and passionate about listening to those who feel most neglected or excluded, and do all we can to build safe and inclusive spaces, in our own home, residential and care homes, congregations, clubs and local communities;
- Seek partners in all faiths, and in people who profess no religious faith but care deeply about safety for all – and work with them;
- Volunteer if we are able to help in groups or organisations assisting those in need or aim to do so;
- Don't pass a Big Issue seller without greeting them even if you don't buy a copy;
- Educate ourselves - read books like *Refugee Boy*, *Two Caravans* or *Kite Runner*; learn to greet people in their own language; be aware of prejudiced views about those seeking sanctuary in UK, and find the facts on the Refugee Council website - www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
- Remember our bodies are sacred, we should care for ourselves too. Scriptural wisdom is serious when it states "love your neighbour as yourself".

Where does Sanctuary come from?

The concept of Sanctuary is thousands of years old and rooted in the Bible. It resulted from Hebrew wisdom emerging from living with the laws of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”.

The Hebrew people created Cities of Sanctuary, which were to give refuge to anyone, including a foreigner, who was accused of manslaughter, preventing the automatic use of revenge as a rough, unfair route to justice ahead of a “trial before the congregation” [Numbers 35:6-15]. Cities of Refuge were about giving protection to people whose lives were in danger. The purpose of Cities of refuge in the Hebrew tradition was the prevention of revenge, not the avoidance of law.

A few thousand years later and it was the church that became the place of sanctuary: as early as 600 AD a general right to give Sanctuary belonged to every church in England. Some Cities were granted the status of *Sanctuary by Royal Charter*. These churches offered protection to debtors and criminals within the church buildings, its precincts, and in some cases to an even larger area. For example, at Beverley, Hexham and Ripon, the boundaries of sanctuary covered the area within a radius of a mile from the church. The boundaries were marked by “sanctuary crosses”, some of which still remain.

Durham Cathedral has a Sanctuary Knocker. Those seeking sanctuary held and rattled the Sanctuary Knocker to gain entrance. The Cathedral still has its Sanctuary Knocker on the door.

In the reign of Henry VIII the number of Sanctuaries was reduced to seven. In 1623 the general right to sanctuary was abolished by statute law. However, the concept of sanctuary began to re-emerge in the 20th Century, first in El Salvador, as a form of protection in churches from the activities of “death squads”. From there it was taken up in the USA when churches sheltered people from Guatemala and El Salvador who had been refused room and refuge. There have been sanctuaries in Churches in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden as well as in Britain.

City of Sanctuary is a contemporary expression of these ancient ideas. It progresses the idea to providing safety and hospitality to vulnerable people, including asylum seekers, children whose lives are in danger, victims of domestic abuse and older people who suffer indignity.

City of Sanctuary is today a growing movement in Britain and Ireland and is focussed on building cultures of welcome and hospitality, particularly, but not exclusively for people seeking sanctuary among us. A City of Sanctuary is not a place where all is well, but a place where many organisations and individuals work within a shared vision of a City that is a place of welcome, hospitality and safety for all people, especially those whose lives are in danger, a City they can be proud to live in. By creating such a vision people can demonstrate the desire to build a more just and humane approach to people seeking sanctuary among us.

Bible reading

Along with the passages referred to, Inderjit draws on a wide range of scriptural quotations and ideas. Some of these are listed for further study and reflection here:

Leviticus 19:34	Isaiah 58:6-9	John 2:1-10
Deuteronomy 4:41-43	Matthew 25:31-46	John 6:1-13
Joshua 20:1-9	Luke 4: 16-30	Acts 2:43-46
Psalms 23	Luke 10:25-37	Hebrews 13:2
Isaiah 53	Luke 14:15-23	1 Peter 2:9-10

Further Reading

Books:

- Barnett, C., Bhogal, I. 2010 [2nd Edition]. *Building A City Of Sanctuary: A Practical Handbook With Inspiring Examples*. Plug and Tap.
- Betts and Collier. 2017. *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*. Allen Lane.
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- Brueggemann, W. 1991. *Interpretation and Obedience*. Fortress Press.
- Byrne, B. 2000. *The Hospitality Of God: A Reading Of Luke's Gospel*. Liturgical Press.
- Cleeve, C. 2008. *The Other Hand*. Sceptre,
- Harding, J. 2000. *The Uninvited: Refugees At The Rich Man's Gate*. Profile Books.
- Jamison, C. 2007. *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps For Everyday Life*. Phoenix.
- Lewycka, M. 2008. *Two Caravans*. Penguin Books, London
- Newman, E. 2007. *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*.
- Pohl, C. 1999. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality As A Christian Tradition*.
- Sacks, J. 2002. *The Dignity of Difference*. Continuum.
- Salgado, S. 2000. *Migrations: Humanity In Transition*. Amazonas Images.
- Sanghera, J. 2007. *Shame*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Song, C. S. 1982. *The Compassionate God*. SCM.
- Vanier, J. 2005. *Befriending The Stranger*. Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Weller, P. 1987. *Sanctuary: The beginnings of a movement?* Runnymede Trust.
- Zephaniah, B. 2001. *Refugee Boy*. Bloomsbury.

Reports:

- *Religion, Society And The Other: Hostility, Hospitality and the Hope of Human Flourishing*. Papers presented by the Elijah Interfaith Academy Think Tank in preparation for the meeting of world religious leaders. Sevilla, Spain [2003]
- *Saving Sanctuary*. The Independent Asylum Commission's first report [2008]
- *The State of Detention: Immigration Detention in the UK in 2014* [2015]

Journals:

- Bhogal, I. 2010. *Sheffield As A City Of Sanctuary*. Coracle. Spring 2010 [Issue 4/43]
- Bhogal, I. 2012. *Sanctuary For All*. Magnet. Winter 2012 [Winter 2012 Number 99],
- Darling, J., Barnett, C., Eldridge, S. 2010. *City Of Sanctuary – A UK Initiative For Hospitality*. Forced Migration Review. February 2010 [Issue 34], pages 46-47
- Goff, C. 2010. *City Of Sanctuary: Preparing A Warm Reception*. New Start. May 2010. [Issue 478], pages 18-23

Movies: *Babettes Feast, Le Havre, Moving to Mars*

“Most refugees and people seeking sanctuary come from situations of pain and suffering - they thus identify with, and find meaning in, the experience of the rejection, suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Their hopes lie in a bruised Messiah.

But the gospel does not go from crucifixion to crucifixion. It goes from crucifixion to resurrection.

We bear witness to this truth when we see, acknowledge, feel, take on, challenge, seek to eradicate and redeem suffering and injustice. We cannot live with the gospel if we allow people to go from torture to torture, homelessness to homelessness, persecution to imprisonment.”

Inderjit Bhogal – Sanctuary for All Resource, available from <http://inderjitbhogal.co.uk>



Methodists for World Mission

www.mwm.org.uk

Email: MWMsec@gmail.com

Twitter: [@MWM_charity](https://twitter.com/MWM_charity)

Facebook and Youtube: 'Methodists for World Mission'

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