

Refugee Week 2024 - 'Our Home' Teaching Outline

Introduction to Refugee Week

- [Refugee Week](#) is the world's largest arts and culture festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Established in 1998 in the UK, this annual festival aligns with World Refugee Day, celebrated globally on 20 June.
- Since Refugee Week 2023, the [current data](#) shows the number of people of concern to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has increased by 7 million to 110.8 million people globally, another new global record. As always, the vast majority of these people are displaced within their country of origin or to neighbouring countries. Only a very small proportion will ever enter the UK.
- In the context of this huge global displacement, what does 'home' mean to someone who has been forced to leave their house, town, country, or even continent to find a place of safety?

Bible Reading

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Key Headings

The idea of a physical home in the Bible

- What does the Bible have to say about home? There is not a lot of discussion of a physical 'home' in the Bible. What about the Israelites? On the surface they were searching for a physical home. However, this home was always in flux. It was not constant. One minute they were in one place, then another, then occupied or held hostage in another land.
- At the time of Jesus, people's homes were often lost through debt driven by taxes. Slavery was common. Slaves couldn't own property and wouldn't have had a home of their own. A safe, secure, physical home was a luxury many couldn't afford.

Physical home now

- Even in the midst of a housing crisis, most people in the UK and Europe are fortunate enough to have a safe, secure, physical home. However, globally the UN reports that [1.6 billion](#) people live in inadequate housing conditions.
- For many people seeking sanctuary, there are significant barriers to accessing housing even here in the UK. For example, The British [Red Cross's commissioned research](#) shows that Ukrainians are four times more likely to present as homeless or be at risk of homelessness than the general population. Also, the Refugee Council's 2024 [Keys to the City Report](#) reports that two in five refugees granted asylum in London were reported as being homeless and living on the streets.

A deeper idea of home

- Malala Yousafzai is an activist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient who came to the UK from Pakistan at the age of 15 after a Taliban gunman attempted to murder her for her activism in seeking the right for girls to go to school. She says of home, 'To me, a home is where you feel loved, safe, and cherished.'
- This idea of home seems to resonate more with the biblical idea of home, which seemingly is focused more on a spiritual idea of home than a physical one: that God - rather than bricks and mortar - is our refuge (Psalm 91:1-2), that we should be more concerned with our heavenly home (2 Corinthians 5:1-10), and that this has room for all (John 14:1-2).
- But many of us reading this *will* have a safe, secure, physical home. As such, we cannot forget our responsibility to those who don't. Hebrews 13:2 says, 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it'; and Matthew 25:34-40 speaks of this responsibility strongly. Indeed, the Founder of The Salvation Army William Booth's reported words echo in our ears: 'Go and do something!'
- And so there is a tension. Those of us in a privileged position are challenged to act, both in a practical and spiritual way. But how?

God models a third way

- Rob and Kristen Bell in their book *The Zimzum of Love* wrote:
 - *Zimzum* (originally *tzimtzum*) is a Hebrew word used in the rabbinic tradition to talk about the creation of the world - not in a scientific way but more like something somewhere between poetry and metaphysical speculation. Followers of this tradition began with the assumption that before there was anything, there was only God. The divine, they believed, was all that was. For something to exist other than God, then, God had to create space that wasn't God. A bit esoteric, but stay with me. Their contention was that for something to exist that wasn't God, God had to contract or withdraw from a certain space that so that something else, something other than God, could exist and thrive in that space. And the word they used for this divine contraction is *zimzum*. God *zimzums*, so that everything we know to be everything can exist and thrive. (p18, *The Zimzum of Love*, Rob and Kristen Bell, William Collins, 2014)
- This idea of *zimzum* gives a lovely model to help us consider our response. How do we, individually and as a church, *zimzum* - make space for - refugees and asylum seekers? How do we help them find home here, in our communities?



Application/Response

Ways you may consider making space for refugees and people seeking asylum and helping them find home are:

- Join the [Welcome Churches](#) Welcome Network and commit to welcoming refugees and people seeking asylum who are looking for a church in your area.
- Commit to pray regularly for refugees and people seeking asylum.
- Find out about the refugee and asylum support groups in the area, join local networks, and see if there are any gaps in support that you can fill (eg conversation classes).
- Start a [Community Sponsorship Programme](#) at the corps. There is a second video you can watch [here](#).
- If you have the space and a spare room, you could consider hosting a refugee in your home. Organisations that can support you are [Refugees at Home](#) or [Housing Justice](#) if you are based in or around London.
- Raise concerns about the treatment of asylum seekers with your local MPs and councillors.

For Discussion

1. In today's world, is a safe, secure, physical home an unrealistic luxury, or is it something everyone should have access to?
2. What makes you feel:
 - Loved?
 - Safe?
 - Cherished?
3. How can we *zimzum*, make space for, refugees and asylum seekers:
 - In our church?
 - In our community?
 - In our country?

