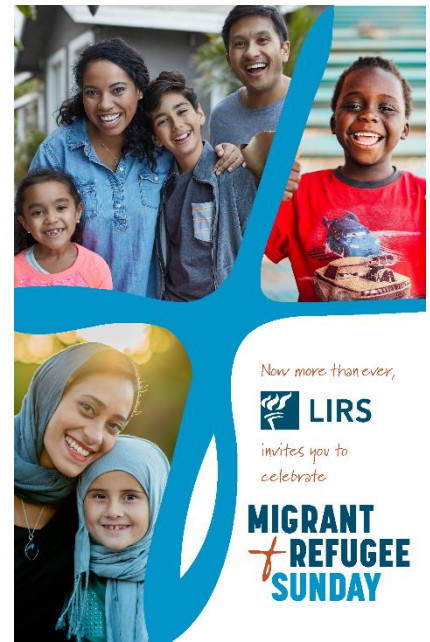


# Migrant and Refugee Sunday - 29 August 2021

## BIBLE READINGS

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.



Ruth 2:3-12

Ruth came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The Lord be with you.' They answered, 'The Lord bless you.' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.'

Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?' But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!

## MESSAGE

As this week was a combined Churches of Maroondah service, below is a brief reflection provided for those unable to log in to the online worship.

Four stories that illustrate Australia's changing attitudes towards migration and refugees ...

**Story 1: Post war migration boom** ... Following the end of World War 2 in 1945, the Federal Government adopted a “populate or perish” approach to migration and financially assisted people to migrate to Australia. Many immigrants came from the UK but there were also many refugees from eastern and southern Europe and the Netherlands. Roughly 100,000 migrants per year were welcomed to Australia through to the end of the 1960s, including my parents-in-law who came from Hungary and Russia respectively.

**Story 2: After the Vietnam war** ... As a signatory to the International Refugee Convention, Australia agreed to take its share of Vietnamese refugees following the fall of Saigon in 1975. Most of these came from refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia, although roughly 2,500 arrived by boat. In the ten years to 1985, Australia accepted around 8,000 refugees per year from Vietnam, including the parents of one of our daughters-in-law.



*Australian Story* this week told the story of how the

Australian Navy rescued 99 Vietnamese refugees from a foundering fishing boat in 1981, took them to Singapore and through the efforts of the captain, arranged for all of them to be accepted into Australia. Some 200,000 Vietnamese people have come to Australia since 1975.

**Story 3: Another rescue at sea – the Tampa** ... On 26 August 2001, the Norwegian container



ship, MV Tampa, rescued 433 people, mostly refugees from Afghanistan, from a sinking vessel. The law of the sea mandated that the captain bring the rescued passengers ashore at the nearest port – Christmas Island. The Australian Government refused to allow the ship to discharge any of the refugees. Following a tense week long standoff and rapid legal

cases in the Federal Court, the government sent 45 SAS troops to commandeer the ship. The same day, Prime Minister John Howard introduced the Border Protection Bill to Parliament, giving the government sweeping powers to refuse entry to people seeking asylum by sea, and making the legislation retrospective to before the arrival of the Tampa in Australian waters. The “Pacific solution” was also established whereby refugees arriving by boat – including those on the Tampa – would be processed offshore (on Nauru) and not be eligible to come to Australia. Of the 433 rescued that fateful day, roughly 210 were settled in NZ, 180 were sent back to Afghanistan and 30 were allowed (several years later) to settle in Australia. But

Australia's stance towards refugees was changed forever. Migration became an issue of "border protection" and "threats to national security". Those arriving by boat were no longer "asylum seekers" but "illegals". The Immigration and Customs departments became Australian Border Force and as a country we lost our moral compass.

**Story 4 The Murugappan family saga ...** Nades, Priya, Kopika and

Tharnicaa are a Tamil Sri Lankan family who used to live in Biloela in rural Queensland. Nades and Priya fled Sri Lanka by boat after the civil war there ended and were granted bridging visas and allowed to live in the community. They met, married and had two girls. When their bridging visas expired in March 2018, ABF officers arrested the family in the middle of the night and transferred them to detention at MITA in Broadmeadows where I met them. In August 2019 the family was to be deported but a last minute court injunction prevented this. Instead the family were sent to Christmas Island Detention Centre where they stayed (at a cost to the taxpayer of \$6.7m) until Tharnicaa



became seriously sick with pneumonia and sepsis and was transferred to Perth Childrens Hospital in June this year. The future of the family is up in the air. The Federal Government reject their refugee claims and want to deport them back to Sri Lanka. They and others claim it is not safe. The Immigration Minister could, at any point, agree to let them stay.

It is not hard to see that Australia's attitudes towards migrants and refugees have changed enormously since 1945. We are now far less compassionate and less generous. The Tampa affair in particular changed the way Australia spoke and acted towards refugees.