

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – March 24, 2019**  
**“Longing for Home”**  
**Psalm 63:1-5, 8 and Isaiah 55:1-9**

“For decades, the North Hill neighborhood in Akron, has been a place for the newly arrived: Italians, Croats, Poles, Irish. And now Nepali-Bhutanese.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, much of Akron’s population growth since the turn of the century is rooted in immigration patterns from the other side of the Earth. “As many as 5,000 Napalis, who held onto their culture during centuries in Bhutan and decades in refugee camps in Nepal, have made their way here during the last decade.”<sup>2</sup>

“Situated between India and China, the isolated Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan has generated one of the highest numbers of refugees in the world in proportion to its population. From 1991 over one sixth of Bhutan's people sought asylum in Nepal, India and other countries around the world. Over 105,000 Bhutanese have spent 15 - 20 years living in refugee camps in Nepal.”<sup>3</sup>

It has been a challenging journey. Those living in the refugee camps face “annual monsoons, periodic fires, little privacy and constant uncertainty about how

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wksu.org/news/story/44537>. Accessed on March 24, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/akron-ohio-bhutanese-refugees\\_us\\_59ca88cfe4b0cdc773353640](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/akron-ohio-bhutanese-refugees_us_59ca88cfe4b0cdc773353640). Accessed on March 24, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> <http://bhutanerefugees.com/>. Accessed on March 24, 2019.

much longer Nepal will let them stay.”<sup>4</sup> And many Bhutanese refugees have experienced trauma from “loss of nationality” and “having to flee suddenly.”<sup>5</sup> Others have suffered the “seizure of their home or property,” or know the pain of “religious and cultural persecution.”<sup>6</sup>

A smaller number of Bhutanese refugees have been separated from family, experienced physical violence or imprisonment, or have endured the memory of the killing of a friend or family member.<sup>7</sup> When many of these refugees reach our communities, they are stressed, anxious, or depressed. And if they feel isolated in their new home, they are at a higher risk for suicide.<sup>8</sup>

I recently joined a service organization, and at our weekly meeting on Tuesday, the club awarded college scholarships to 10 area high school students. Among the honorees was a young woman who spent her first 14 years of life in a Nepalese refugee camp. She then moved, along with her family, to Arizona, where she was bullied daily for not speaking English.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Ultimately, the family relocated to Akron's North Hill, where they have joined a community that shares their culture, language, and customs. Now, the young woman who arrived in America speaking no English at all is completing high school with a 3.8 grade point average. She is college bound, and her parents are beaming with pride. After years of hardship, the family is experiencing the reality of God's abundance.

Since Ash Wednesday, Christians around the world have been on a journey together, reflecting on the somber realities of human hardship and struggle. For forty days, all who trust in Jesus are invited to prepare our bodies, minds, and spirits for the agony of Good Friday and the promised renewal of Easter.

The number forty is biblically significant. You may recall that the Hebrew people spent forty years in the wilderness or that, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus observed a forty-day period of fasting.<sup>9</sup> By the third and fourth centuries, Christian communities began modeling their own Lenten observances after his, and for the next 1,500 years, the Lenten mood from Monday - Saturday has typically been serious and contemplative. The faithful receive a mini reprieve during Sunday Sabbaths as we share with one another words of praise and renewal.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition*, (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2013), 557.

For our worship today, I have selected two scriptures from the Old Testament. Both are found in the Revised Common Lectionary, and both serve the purpose of providing that Sabbath reprieve I just mentioned. Here, the psalmist speaks of beholding God’s power and glory, of centering one’s life in thanksgiving and blessing, and of being satisfied to observe a right relationship with God. He writes, “my soul is satisfied as with a rich feast.”

In our second lesson, Isaiah carries this theme even further, saying, “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without price... eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” Theologically, this passage is an expression of hope. The hope here is that those “Judeans whose families were removed from Jerusalem more than a generation before would now return and resettle.”<sup>10</sup>

As Patricia Tull explains, “Isaiah announces free access first to water and then, more extravagantly, to wine and milk. Instead of overspending for basics, as they

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<sup>10</sup> Ed. Joel B. Green, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C, Volume 1*. (Westminster John Knox, 2018), 61.

were forced to do during Babylonian rule, the audience is invited to reinvest in a land where they may once again enjoy necessities and more.”<sup>11</sup>

My youngest son, Nathan, is three years old. He attends daycare at the Jewish Community Center, known locally by its acronym, the JCC. On Thursday, we sent him to school in a cape and crown at the request of his teacher. Together, the children would celebrate the Jewish festival of Purim, commemorating the Jew’s deliverance from Haman by Esther and Mordecai.

In honor of the occasion, the JCC’s service-minded Granny Group made traditional deserts, which Nathan was happy to describe to us before sampling and sharing with the rest of his family. Purim reminds me that, for people in exile, eating, drinking, and celebrating together is a hopeful antidote to the more somber realities of human existence.

As one scholar observes, “tradition and practice in Lent call for less, not more. Spiritual disciplines focus on shedding, not adding. The guiding symbolic action in Lent is fasting, not feasting.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, the prophet’s call is to “bask in God’s abundance: eat, drink, and be satisfied beyond measure.”<sup>13</sup> And this, too, is a fitting

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

response in Lent. For “the most meaningful Lenten journeys include an encounter with God’s abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness.”<sup>14</sup> May it be so, and all thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.