Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference Hamburg

11th-15th September, 2026

'A Changing Church in an Age of Migration'

The Readings and sermon by the Rt Rev Jana Jeruma-Grinberga

Jeremiah 29:1, 4–8
These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams that you dream.

Psalm 107:1–9
Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, for God's mercy endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe,
gathering them in from the lands; from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
Some wandered in desert wastes; they found no path to a city where they might dwell.
They were hungry and thirsty; their spirits languished within them.
Then in their trouble they cried to the Lord, and you delivered them from their distress.
You led them on a straight path to go to a city where they might dwell.
Let them give thanks to you, Lord, for your steadfast love and your wonderful works for all people.
For you satisfy the thirsty soul and fill the hungry with good things"
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Hebrews 11:8–12
By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith, with Sarah's involvement, he received power of procreation, even though he was too old, because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

The Sermon

As I began my journey towards Hamburg yesterday, I arrived in Rīga, the capital of Latvia, in apocalyptic rain. That was my excuse for popping in to one of my favourite cafés, the unpromisingly named Wok'n'Kurry, which actually serves a very decent plate of food. The young man serving and I got into conversation, and it turned out that he is a Sri Lankan. He came to Latvia to study engineering, stayed and bought a café, and is planning to do a Masters degree. That seemed like a really

serendipitous encounter in the context of our conference here in Hamburg – an example of migration that has brought benefits to this ambitious young man, and benefits equally for his host nation. Not least the fact that we had a lovely conversation about cricket and the upcoming Sri Lankan tour to England.

Migration has become such a politically explosive topic, one on which people tend to have strong opinions. Here in Germany we have seen the alarming rise of the Alternative für Deutschland; in the UK Reform and Restore are exploiting immigration to gain electoral traction, and in the US this has become a nation-dividing issue.

So let us start by putting some context to this. Our readings today remind us that the Bible is so much a story of migration. Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Isaac, Moses and Miriam, the exile in Babylon and return from there; Joseph and his brothers…. The New Testament, too, witnesses to the migration that formed the background to Paul's journeys in Acts; for after all, he travelled to places where the Jews had migrated over the centuries and established communities – Rome, Corinth and so on. And, as is often quoted, Jesus' family was forced to flee to Egypt in the wake of Herod's raging.

In that sense, migration has just been a facet of normal life – individuals, tribes and whole nations have migrated backwards and forwards across the globe. Sometimes they are pushed out of their home environment by wars, natural disasters or political considerations – and Meelis and I are both examples of this. My parents were refugees from Latvia at the end of World War II, driven by fear of the invading Soviet forces. Sometimes migrants are pulled by the attraction of a better, safer, more fulfilling life. Fighting against this feature of humankind's existence in this world seems futile, and it is a question for us to answer – why has migration become such a hot and divisive topic when it has existed since human beings first migrated out of Africa? Why has seeking for a better, safer, more fulfilling life now become reprehensible?

One more thought. In a sense, the whole of our spiritual history, of *Heilsgeschichte* or *historia salutis*, is a story of migration. However, we view the first chapters of Genesis – as myth, metaphor or literal truth – they do tell of humankind's journey away from a state of paradise or bliss with God as Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden. The rest of the tale is our struggle, humankind's journey to return to God – a way of understanding our own lives. Indeed, we are born, naked and perfect, we live our lives for better or worse and then return to the God who was there at the start of our journey and who awaits us at the ending of the day. It's a cliché to say that life is a journey, or a pilgrimage, but nonetheless true for that. We journey and we travel – for only through that do we learn and grow as children of God.

During this conference we will hear about several different experiences of migration – physical, spiritual and ecclesiological. Each of these tellings will be part of this magnificent, terrible and beautiful journey of life, this pilgrimage that we share together. I am looking forward to it very much, and I'm sure you are, too. Thanks be to God, who has brought us together to Hamburg, whose Spirit will be alongside us during these days of learning and exploration, and who will journey along with us as we return to our homes.