

SERMON: REFUGEES – PROBLEM OR PEOPLE 16th August 2015

Luke 10:25-37 The Good Samaritan

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Thousands of boat people from Syria and Afghanistan have set up camps in the popular Greek island of Kos - with holidaymakers branding the situation 'disgusting'. Refugees from war-torn Afghanistan and Syria have taken shelter under arcades on the seafront in Kos town as they wait to receive security clearance for onward travel to mainland Greece.

As holiday-makers relax on sun loungers on the beach, just a yards away scores of refugees are sleeping on cardboard boxes.

Anne, a nurse from Manchester, had come to Kos expecting a relaxing break with her husband Tony, a retired plumber.

Instead, she says that her summer break has turned into a nightmare as penniless refugees who are in Greece to claim asylum sit outside their restaurant and watch them eat.

Barefoot toddlers in filthy clothes play among debris while moustached men sit staring out to sea as they plan the next stage of their journey to Athens and the rest of Europe.

Young mothers change their babies and wash their children's clothes in the sea, sharing the promenade with tourists who sit uncomfortably on the beachfront.

Groups of young men squatt together under the shade of the tree looking on while holiday-makers queue for ice-cream.

One group of Afghan girls sitting on the dismantled cardboard boxes that are their beds explain how they have run out of money after a week staying eight to a room in a B&B.

Greeks are donating what they can. One elderly man hands a breastfeeding mother in a headscarf 10 euros. 'For the baby', he said.

6,000 refugees have landed on Kos in the past two months, with fresh landings on the beach every night.

For the Greeks, already mired in economic crisis, the refugees' arrival adds to their woes.

As one resident says, 'This island is already in trouble. The people are kind- they give them blankets but they have very little for themselves. You cannot share what you don't have.'

Most of the refugees crossed the narrow two mile channel from Bodrum in Turkey in rubber dinghies.

The surge of refugees to the Greek islands has been caused by a crack down by the Turks on cargo ships that were ferrying refugees to Italy at the end of last year.

WHY ARE PEOPLE LEAVING SYRIA?

The conflict in Syria has now driven more than four million people – a sixth of the population – to seek sanctuary in neighbouring countries, making it the largest refugee crisis for a quarter of a century, according to the UN.

Most of the refugees are in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and other parts of north Africa.

In addition there are 8 million people who have been forced from their homes and are still within Syria, almost half the country's people are either refugees or internally displaced.

Worsening conditions are driving growing numbers towards Europe and further afield, but the overwhelming majority remain in the region, hoping that the conflict will end and that they will be able to return to their homes.

BIBLE MIGRANTS

ECONOMIC / LIFESTYLE

Abraham – Ur, Haran, Canaan, Egypt

Jacob and family

Naomi & Ruth

Ezra & Jews

Nehemiah

Romans

Greeks

Jews

EXILED / REFUGEES

Jacob and family

Moses

Joseph

Naomi and family

David

Elijah

Jonah

Samaritans

Jews – from Egypt with Moses

Jews – to Egypt with Jeremiah

Jews captives to Assyria

Jews captives to Babylon

Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack, Abednigo, Ezekiel

Esther

JOSEPH, MARY AND JESUS (age about 2)

Christians after the death of Stephen – persecution - left Jerusalem

Church in Antioch, Syria – various nationalities

Barnabas Jew from Cyprus

Paul from Tarsus in Turkey

Jews all over Roman Empire

John on Isle of Patmos

Paul prisoner taken to Rome

OUR HISTORY

EXILES / REFUGEES

Protestants before Reformation – Tyndale, John Knox

Huganots – French protestants

Supporters of Charlie after Culloden

Highland clearances

Jews – Nazis

Eastern Europeans – communism

Asians – east Africa

ECONOMIC / LIFESTYLE

OUT - EMMIGRANTS

USA

Canada

Australia

NZ

Africa

Asia

Scots to England & other British to Scotland

Europe

Spain

Oil workers

IN - IMMIGRANTS

White Africans

Asians

West Indians

Irish

Eastern Europeans

Other Europeans

Oil industry – Aberdeen

WHO ARE THE SYRIAN REFUGEES?

Sani Saleh, an IT teacher from Damascus, said that the boats to Italy were no longer running, 'but there are thousands of boats to Kos'. 'It's very easy to find one'.

Like many he plans to cross Europe on the overland route via Bulgaria and Serbia, then into Hungary and the EU. 'I want to go to the UK because I know many people there. I speak English.

Ihab Hilal, an optician from Aleppo. The 29-year-old who said he was hounded by ISIS after carrying out first aid on injured people.

Jihad Naif, a dentist who said he hoped to make it to the UK, said he had fled the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa after his cousin was beheaded by the militant Islamists.

'My uncle's son had his head cut off because they said he was working for the Syrian Free Army'.

CALAIS SITUATION

In April refugees were moved from squats in Calais to a site 5 miles from the city. It is a former rubbish dump with no power or water – the French are putting pressure on people to move on.

Situation in Calais caused by French attitude to the refugees – in France just offering to help an undocumented refugee or migrant can result in a fine of £20,000 and up to 5 years in prison. This has discouraged charities and individuals from giving out food and other essentials. The refugees are desperate. No wonder that they are trying to cross into Britain.

BRITISH RESPONSE

Government response has been very negative. David Cameron has called them a “swarm heading for Britain”. Philip Hammond the Foreign Secretary “a marauding threat to Europe”. This sort of language stirs up fear, anger, revulsion stoking the hysteria instead of calming it. It is a great exaggeration.

The reality is that these are frightened refugees who have already been traumatized by the experiences they are fleeing from. They are human beings in desperate straits and in desperate circumstances and we should have compassion on them.

The majority of the 3,000 people in Calais are refugees from Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, and Afghanistan. They have not gathered to invade Britain or Europe but because they feared for their lives and were willing to risk everything in search of safety.

Britain has had a proud tradition of providing refuge to people fleeing war and persecution but far from being swamped by refugees we are not pulling our weight.

Since the crisis began in Syria 5 years ago Britain has only taken 2% of Europe's Syrian refugee claims, 4% of all refugee claims including other nationalities – a tenth of the number taken by Germany.

Under the resettlement scheme for the most vulnerable Syrian Refugees, only 187 people have been admitted to the UK in the past 5 years (37/year)
Others have come in as visitors or have been smuggled in, paying gangsters huge sums of money.

In total Britain has taken a total of about 6,000 over 5 years (1,200/year)
Germany has taken 90,000 (x15) and Sweden 60,000 (x10)

The idea that refugees are in Britain to sponge off the state does not stand up to scrutiny. Far from leeching off Britain refugees can provide a significant economic benefit. Research estimates that non-EU migrants made a net contribution of £5 billion to the economy in the past 10 years. EU migrants also contributed £20 billion. That's a total of £25 billion.

BIBLE RESPONSE

RUTH & NAOMI – helped by Boaz

THE GOOD SAMARITAN – helped a foreigner

Jews & Samaritans were enemies – different nationality & religion.

The Jewish priest and Levite were afraid – reaction controlled by fear

Samaritan saw an injured man – a human being who needed help

He was filled with pity

Put himself in danger – could also have been attacked by robbers

Cost him to help – time and money

“poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

Gave innkeeper 2 silver coins and said “when I come back I will pay you whatever else you spend on him”.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Find out more about the people who are refugees and what is happening in the countries they have come from
- Pray for them
- Support charities that are helping refugees – Tear Fund, Open Doors, Barnabas, Mercy Corps, Medicine Sans Frontiers
- Sign the Barnabas petition
- Write to your MP

Look on the refugees as people – people who need our help just now, but also people who can make a positive contribution to our society

STORY: PETER KERTESZ – VET

(Readers Digest p.49)

Born in Budapest. Fled from Communism violence in 1957.

Now a world expert in animal dentistry as well as his own (human) practice.

Jesus asked the teacher of the Law, “Who acted like a neighbour to the man attacked by robbers?” and he answered, “The one who was kind to him”.

Jesus then said, “You go and do the same”.

And this is his word for us today – “You go and do the same”.