

Reflection by Mel Taylor

A Church of Sanctuary

In the past few weeks, a regular feature on the news has been pictures of overcrowded inflatable boats crossing the English Channel.

The human beings on these boats are usually called 'migrants.' The response of the Government and much of the press has been hostile, focusing on illegal entry rather than the plight of these people.

Boris Johnson has called these people 'stupid' for travelling in unsafe boats, but if you are escaping from violence and persecution, these are the risks you are willing to take.

As Stephen Hale, the Chief Executive of the charity Refugee Action writes, "*Most of us are fortunate enough to be unaware of what it's like to have family members murdered, your home destroyed or to undergo torture. Many of these people are not.*" <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/>

There is also a widespread belief that they are treated too generously. At Six Ways, we know this is not true. Former and current church members have spent years waiting for asylum claims to be heard, not being allowed to work and having to survive on very small amounts of income.

Our Bible reading today was from Mark 6: 7-13 where Jesus sends out his disciples in pairs to preach and bring mental & physical healing to the people, taking 'nothing for the journey except a staff.'

They preached 'that people should repent.' Repentance (*metanoia*) literally means 'a change of mind.'

If we are seeking to follow Jesus, the one who started life as a refugee, we need to reject the mind-set of so much of the popular press and the Government.

Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church was officially recognised as a church of sanctuary on Sunday 13th October 2019. We have refugees, asylum seekers and the descendants of refugees in our congregation. Our aim is to be welcoming and inclusive, while supporting people in their dealings with officialdom.

May we continue to support organisations like Restore, a project of Birmingham Churches Together, which aims to welcome, include and assist the integration of refugees and those seeking sanctuary from persecution.

<https://www.restore-uk.org>

PRAYER for MIGRANTS, REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS

*God, no one is stranger to you
And no one is ever far from your loving care.
In your kindness watch over migrants,
refugees and asylum seekers,
Those separated from their loved ones,
Those who are lost
And those who have been exiled from their homes.*

Bring them safely to the place where they long to be,

Help us always to show your kindness to strangers and those in need.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, Who was a refugee and migrant

Who travelled to another land searching for a home.

Amen.

<http://nouwen-network.com/Refugee>