

# Leavening Church

## Who is my neighbour? (Steve Langton)

Today is Refugee Sunday and the bible is of course very clear that we need to care for refugees. The instruction to look after foreigners and not to take advantage of them is something that occurs repeatedly in the old testament, perhaps slightly surprisingly given the bloody battles with the surrounding nations that are also described. Exodus gives part of the logic for this: ‘*Do not ill-treat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt*’ ([Exodus 22: 21](#)). Similar sentiments occur in many other places, in Leviticus the Jews are told to provide for the poor and foreigners ([Leviticus 19:10](#)). There are many other similar passages, and of course the whole book of Ruth has this theme.

It is therefore good that many Christians and many churches are involved in providing support to refugees. This is just what we would expect in view of what James calls the ‘royal law’ – ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ ([James 2:8](#)). And remember that in the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus pushed the definition of ‘neighbour’ to mean a stranger from another country. But in today’s interconnected world I would suggest that the definition of our neighbour needs to be broadened even further, because modern technology means that we learn about the suffering of so many people, not just those living in our country.

In 2020 over three quarters of those granted asylum in the UK were male, with a disproportionate number of them in the 18-29 age range<sup>1</sup>. It seems highly unlikely to me that there are less women facing persecution in the world than men, so I would suggest that this sex ratio implies that young fit males are the ones that make it to safety, whereas more women, children and the elderly are left to suffer in their own countries. We should be worrying about those as well as the refugees that do make it to our shores.

Our society is very critical of our colonial past with its links to slavery, but are we any better than they were? We don’t have slaves, but we do maintain an economic system with massive inequalities in health, wealth and power between countries. We all benefit from that inequality each time we buy cheap goods produced in poorer countries with low wages and little protection for workers. And the excuse of ignorance is more difficult to justify in today’s world than it was a few hundred years ago. I fear that history will judge us just as severely as we judge our slave-owning ancestors.

So my challenge to you in the coming week is to do one little thing to help those who suffer due to persecution or poverty overseas. There are many things you could do – join an organisation like Amnesty International, support a charity like Christian Aid, write to your MP about the unfairness of the asylum system or the cuts in foreign aid, or maybe buy some fair trade foods. Let’s show we really do love our neighbours in the widest sense.

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<sup>1</sup> UK government data. Figures are based on main applicants. 71% are male if dependents are included.