

**Come and Stay at My Home**  
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**Sixth Sunday of Easter, 1/5/16**

There are no prizes for guessing what I'm going to talk about today. Paul had a dream, in which a man said to him: 'Come over into Macedonia and help us.' So he and his companions got into a boat at Troas, which is in present-day Turkey, and they made their way in stages to mainland Greece. They stayed there for a few days, and then a woman said to them: 'Come and stay at my home.'

Every day for months we have been seeing the pictures and hearing about the migrants getting into boats in Turkey and trying their best to go in stages to mainland Greece. Every one of them wants to hear someone saying: 'Come and stay at my home.'

Now I accept that the back stories are rather different. Paul hadn't been driven out of his own country, and he wasn't trying to escape war, persecution or starvation. He arrived with a few companions, and as a Roman citizen he was effectively free to go wherever he wished. But as a man with a message which was in stark contradiction to the beliefs, practices and culture of Jews, Greeks and Romans, he wasn't automatically a welcome visitor. Indeed, a few days later 'the authorities' put him and Silas in prison because they had stopped some local men from doing the business and making the money they were used to. The comparison is uncomfortably close.

Lydia must have been an interesting woman. She was from Thyatira, not far from Troas back in Turkey, but she was in Philippi dealing in purple cloth, an important and valuable commodity. Purple was the most expensive and most sought-after dye, and purple clothing was worn by the rich, the powerful and the regal (which is why the soldiers dressed Jesus in a purple robe to mock his claim to be King of the Jews). Lydia was a businesswoman on a serious scale, trading in her own right and deciding for herself who should come to her home (which is clearly in Philippi, not back in Thyatira, because when Paul and Silas were released from prison they went back there before going on to other towns in Greece). She and her household were baptised. There was no man at the head of that household, keeping his wife in her place and deciding what should be done and who could come and go. She invited Paul to stay.

Today's migrants are less fortunate than Paul. When they arrive they are herded into camps and 'processed' at reception centres. Some are sent back immediately. Greece is a country with huge financial problems, but it is still far and away better than where the migrants have come from. You will have seen what has been happening in Aleppo in the last few days, and regularly read about the fate of Yazidis, middle-eastern Christians and the wrong sorts of Muslims. Yet how can the Greeks be expected to cope with it all? Governments despair. Committees meet. Politicians make brave or defiant or emollient statements. Groups of very fortunate people – at least in comparison to the migrants – gather to protest at the threats to their comfort. And the migrants pile up at the edge of Europe. Most of the recent decisions that have been made are about sending people back.

And yet. A few weeks ago there was a very small news story about an elderly Greek woman. Her pension, which was already none too generous, had been cut in half by the austerity measures. But she had opened her door and said: 'Come and stay at my home', and now has four young Syrian men to look after. They call her 'Grandma'.

It makes me feel extremely uncomfortable, and yet how can I do anything about it? I remember forty years ago when Idi Amin kicked out the Ugandan Asians. People all over Britain offered

rooms in their homes to the refugees. This time around, the authorities are only interested if you have an entire house or flat to rent out. Most of us don't. Anyway, if we want the migrants to become accustomed to the British way of life and British values, what better than to live with a British family for a while? We have to find constructive ways, across the whole of Europe, to say, figuratively and literally: 'Come and stay at my house.' Of course there will be the odd chancer or religious radical. But no-one takes the risks and endures the difficulties and humiliations that these migrants do, unless staying where they were has become intolerable.

A worker-priest friend of mine has just come back from a weekend with others in Germany. They were, inevitably, discussing immigration, and they noticed an interesting linguistic difference. 'Fluchtling' is the German word for refugee, but it also means deserter, or fugitive. The emphasis is on flight, running away, escape. Our word 'refugee' means one who seeks refuge. They are coming towards it, being received into it. These refugees have a vision of what they are coming towards. It is not unlike the new Jerusalem: a city of light, open to all nations with no barriers to entry and no fear or deception. There is food and water for all, and 'the leaves of the tree (of life) are for the healing of the nations'. There will be no war, and no persecution.

But only if we make it so. Half of the candidates in next week's London mayoral and assembly elections are explicitly demanding harsh controls or a complete ban on immigration. No-one is saying: 'Let's make London an example to the world. We are the richest city in one of the richest countries in the world. We can afford to be generous. Come and stay at our home.'

But perhaps, like gutsy Lydia and that Greek grandmother, we should be looking very hard for ways to say it ourselves.