



Longer Tables, Lower Fences - Reflections for Lent 2019
Week 2 – 17th March
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Sharing our blessings

For over a year, I have been getting to know a family from Syria, who came to live in the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. This Government initiative relies on suitable rental property being made available, offered by church or community groups, or by private landlords who then receive a realistic rent, initially via the benefit system. Local councils, charities, church members and the Cities of Sanctuary movement provide support so that families can access ESOL language and skills training and receive practical help. In Kent, Sussex and Hampshire, LIST (Language and Integration Skills Training) is provided by 'Concept Training' for a number of refugee men, women and teenagers. They also provide a safe space in which students can begin to deal with the psychological effects of their traumatic experiences as refugees.

Already, my Syrian friends are becoming more confident in their new surroundings, so different from the refugee camp in Lebanon, their last home. Their son is doing well in the local primary school and making friends of his own. His mother is a terrific cook and loves providing hospitality in her home for those like myself who are fortunate enough to know her. I was thrilled when she agreed to provide some items for the church Christmas fayre, getting up at 5am that morning to bake. The baklava went down a treat!



Homemade baklava

To ponder:

- Could you or your church offer accommodation to rent so that another family of refugees can leave the camp in Lebanon and find a welcome in the UK?
- How would you develop a relationship with a person from a different culture?
- How might there be mutual blessing in such a friendship?
- Find out what provision your local council is offering under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and consider whether you could get involved.

Prayer: Generous God, we thank you for our homes and for shared meals with families and friends. Please teach us how to share with others the blessings we have come to enjoy. Help us to see you in the faces of friends and strangers alike. Amen.

Bible link: **Hebrews 13:2** *'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.'* (NIV) Read **Ruth 2: 3-7** which describes how Ruth, far from home, was given hospitality and welcome by Boaz. Also **Genesis 18: 1-8**, when Abraham and Sarah welcomed the three strangers and received a surprise blessing.

Hymn: **Singing the Faith 409** v 4 *'Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face; let us bring an end to fear and danger: All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.'*