

October 2016

It's raining. It's really raining. It's making Yorkshire weather look good.

Last week it rained continuously for two days. I don't think it even stopped (although I did go in Macdonalds a couple of times so I can't be certain).

It is also cold. Overnight, it went from being 35 degrees to 8 (it was like going from Douala to Derby County). However, while this atrocious weather would easily have become the topic of conversation in England, here we are blessed with bureaucracy.

In Italy everyone has to make a deceleration of residence. Outsiders, including EU citizens, have to do this soon after their arrival. On our first visit to the office we were told we couldn't have an appointment for three months and then we had an aborted visit when they told us additional documents were required!

To cut a long story short we have yet to get it all fully sorted but I can't complain. On Sundays our church takes breakfast to the people sleeping rough. While there are many homeless Italians the number of migrants stuck at the central station continues to increase.

Last week, as I was giving out cups of tea, I saw two push chairs approaching me. At first I just thought they were being used to carry belongings. When the owner, I think he was a Syrian man, started speaking to us he said he had tried to go north but was told they "don't want any more Arabs" there so he was forced to come back. It was then that three tired children emerged from beneath the blankets. The man said, "I don't know where to go, I am a Christian, but they think I am their enemy."

I didn't know what to say to him. I wanted desperately to say something, but I was speechless. Frozen by the brutality of the situation, I just stood there. After he finished his tea he went on his way and the three children went back to sleep. I wanted to stop and lie down, but somehow I continued giving out breakfast.

Many people are still asleep when we give them the food. I try not to wake them up but one huge (and very strong) man stirred when I put his breakfast down next to him. I was a little nervous but I needn't have been. When we gave him the food tears started rolling down his face. We tried to say something to encourage him but he just kept crying. As I looked into his eyes his tears reminded me of the cold Milanese rain. I wondered whether God was crying, whether the water pouring down from the heavens might be tears of despair.

I cannot comprehend what the man was going through. All I know is that he is "illegal." He can't work, he has to sleep outside and he is breaking the law simply by "being" here.

How did it come to this? Why are we so frightened of each other? Why can't we welcome the stranger in our midst? They don't want benefits – they want to work. They are brilliant people - many of them are very highly educated. They could make an enormous contribution to our nations. What has become of us?

Please pray that we get our documents. Pray that we continue to learn Italian.

Please pray for Europeans, that we would not fear outsiders.

Please pray for the migrants, that God would bless them (Eph 3:14-21).