

May 2019

I am in Nigeria - doing two weeks teaching at a University on John Wesley and the rise of Methodism. Please pray I continue to have good health and for God's continued protection.

God has been very good to me. I nearly gave up on coming for several reasons. The Nigerian embassy in Italy asked me to produce the registration document for the theological institution and, being Easter, it was a busy time for the college staff.

As the date for my departure drew nearer, I tried contacting another embassy-the Nigerian embassy to the Vatican. This didn't work out either (a difficult time of year for them also). As I was about to give up I noticed that my flight to Lagos passed through Ghana and so I decided it was worth adjusting my itinerary slightly to see if I might be more successful there.

The traffic in Ghana's capital city is legendary and traveling from the outskirts to the centre felt longer than going from Milan to Rome. To make things worse, when I finally arrived, I was told that I couldn't apply for a visa there. At this point I really wanted to give up, but I was challenged not to by a Nigerian friend (please pray for him).

Over the last two years we have got to know a young man who stands in front of the supermarket opposite our church building in Italy. Though he is asking for money I had, until recently, tried to buy him lunch instead. As time has passed we have got to know each other well and have become friends.

He has shared a lot with us about his life. A graduate in accounting, he comes from the troubled delta region of Nigeria. Though billions of pounds of oil have been extracted from the area, local residents have come to resent the presence of foreign oil companies.

Over time pipe leakages have damaged the soil and groundwater supply making it impossible to grow food in polluted areas. Eventually local opposition brimmed over into sabotage of the oil network (using explosives) which often leads to innocent casualties. One such explosion occurred near my friend's house, killing his family, and so he left Nigeria.

Traveling through the anarchy of Libya he witnessed some awful scenes. Migrants like himself kidnapped in order to extort money from their relatives back home. Many are beaten and some forced to work as slaves.

On arrival in Italy, two years ago, my friend applied for asylum. Unable to work, he has managed to keep himself through begging and the small allowances given by the government.

Please pray for him. While I was in Ghana he called me to say his application for asylum had been rejected. I wanted to cry. However, instead, of him feeling sorry for himself he asked me how my visa application for Nigeria was going. As I told him I was going to abandon the idea he told me to "never give up." I persevered and managed (after plenty wahala) to get into Nigeria.

When I turn on the news, I cannot help feeling that the European response to the migration crisis is unChristian. For example, in Italy there is a politician who insists that people who originally come from Italy got there first and so they should be put first. Jesus said something quite different (Matt 20:9).

I can't help imagining what it would be like if the media and politicians (stopped talking about Brexit) and started to offer us a deeper comprehension of what migrants are actually going through.

Maybe, just maybe, public opinion would change. In the meantime, incredible people like my friend, people who could make a profound contribution, are being sent away.

Daniel