



This photo shows a Syrian mother trying to hold her baby above the water, after the boat they were on sank in the Mediterranean.

According to the UN, the vast majority of refugees have fled from Syria, where an estimated 220,000 to more than 300,000 people have been killed during its appalling and escalating war. In 2015, 200,000 migrants have entered Greece, and another 110,000 have reached Italy. At least 2,373 have died. In all of 2014, 3,281 people died trying to reach Europe by sea.

Imagine waking your children in the morning, feeding and dressing them, pulling a little girl's hair into a ponytail, arguing with a little boy about which pair of shoes he wants to wear. Now imagine, as you are doing that, you know later today you will strap their vulnerable bodies into enveloping life jackets and take them with you in a rubber dinghy - through waters which have claimed many who have done the same. Think of the story you'd have to tell to reassure them. Think of trying to make it fun. Consider the emotional strength needed to smile at them and conceal your fear. Try and envisage how it would feel like when that experience – your frantic flight from war – was then diminished by a vicious, dishonest media that crudely labelled you and your family "illegal," as if you were a scourge on society. Imagine having little to no voice in countering this description of you so commonly used by governments and journalists.



The bodies of 71 refugees were found in an abandoned truck in Austria, on the road between Budapest and Hungary. They were most likely fleeing war-ravaged Syria, and probably suffocated inside the truck, and then were decomposing in the heat. Sixty of the victims were men, 8 women, and three children, ages 2, 3 and 8.

Italian authorities said Friday they had arrested 10 people on suspicion of multiple homicide in connection with the discovery of 52 bodies aboard a boat packed with migrants and refugees off the coast of Libya this week. They were jammed into the airless hold which was only a metre high, with two small windows and the boat's engine.

Survivors of sea passages told harrowing tales, such as being charged money to come out of the ship's hold to breathe. A 25-year-old man from Sudan said, "We didn't want to go down there but they beat us with sticks and threatened us with knives to force us. We had no air so we were trying to get back up through the hatch and breathe through the cracks in the ceiling. But other passengers were scared that the boat would capsize so they pushed us back down and beat us, too. Some were stomping on our hands."

The trip from Turkey to Greece's eastern islands is one of the shortest, safest trips by sea to Europe — but it still can be terrifying for migrants making the crossing in the pitch dark. Nour Kady, a 30-year-old Syrian, said he had paid \$2,200 to Turkish smugglers for the two-hour journey to the Greek island of Lesbos by boat for himself, his wife and their 1-year-old son. He called the trip harrowing, with 60 people crammed into a 9 metre boat. He says "we set out at 2 a.m., the sea was rough, there were big waves."



Two boats carrying hundreds of people from various nations have capsized this week near the Libyan city of Zuwara, with fears that more than 200 will have died.

Song of Solomon

Listen! It's my lover: here he comes now, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.
My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Here he stands now, outside our wall, peering through the windows, peeking through the lattices.
My lover spoke and said to me, "Rise up, my dearest, my fairest, and go. Here, the winter is past;
the rains have come and gone.
Blossoms have appeared in the land; the season of singing[a] has arrived, and the sound of the
turtledove is heard in our land.
The green fruit is on the fig tree, and the grapevines in bloom are fragrant.
Rise up, my dearest, my fairest, and go.

The images are delightful and invitational. To rise and go. Spring is in the air. Opportunities are plentiful.
(*discuss the prospects when 'the world is your oyster'*)

But what happens when spring turns to winter.....when hopes are dashed.....when the future is
unknown and to be feared. (*discuss the experience of refugees forced to flee*)

James 1: 26,27 - If those who claim devotion to God don't control what they say, they mislead
themselves. Their devotion is worthless. True devotion, the kind that is pure and faultless before
God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficulties.

And what are the challenges as well as opportunities for us in being both 'do-ers' and 'hearers', in
being faithful to the example of Christ, and in exercising Christian practices of generosity,
compassion, kindness.....