

It seems to me that not a week goes by without another horrifying news story of vulnerable people who have been exploited and sadly died in their pursuit of safety.

I wonder what you think of when you hear the word Dunkirk? I am guessing you are probably thinking of soldiers, World War two and the terrible situation they found themselves in - completely trapped and their untimely rescue.



Today Dunkirk finds itself in a different situation, today at Dunkirk you will find over 500 refugees living in massively overcrowded conditions. I can't help but wonder what will be the outcome of their situation?



In this picture we have a lady who has travelled 3,000 miles with seven children on her own. They arrived where Care 4 Calais was distributing essential items. The youngest child was just five years old and all their worldly possessions were packed in plastic carrier bags.

They had been left there that morning by local French authorities who had taken another family away and promised to come back for them but then not returned. They had been there for five hours with no food or water.

Care 4 Calais took them to the nearby 'gym' where 300 people are currently accommodated in a space that has only a few showers and toilets, not having been built for accommodation purposes. There are so many people there now that another 200 are camped outside.

These are people that have fled war torn countries and persecution, leaving their businesses, homes and family members to go in search of safety and the chance to live without fear. They need our help; they don't warrant our fear.



During my sabbatical I've had the opportunity to volunteer with Care 4 Calais. The Charity's main aim is to deliver essential aid and support to refugees living in Northern France and Belgium. I was able to visit different settlements in and around Calais, to help with the distribution of services, drinks, talking and playing games with the refugees. It was great to meet and get to know them.

Everyone was so open and friendly, I found myself wondering if I found myself in the same situation, would I react with as much grace?



I was surprised at how many of the settlements we visited were just out of sight, so not to draw any unwanted attention. But actually if you stop and look you can see them, if you have the heart to open your eyes to see the need!

The stories I heard of the journey made to this point were perilous and made my hair stand on end. These are not people who have come here by choice to take advantage of our generosity. That's a caricature. Who would go through what they've gone through – terror, bereavement, loss of all their possessions – unless their lives depended on it? They're here because existence is impossible back home.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to help with distribution of humanitarian aid in similar ways in other parts of Europe, namely the Balkans, this however has been the closest I've ever been to home in such work. I believe we have a

responsibility to help these people. This is a globalised world and we can't pretend it isn't happening, because it is.

I am glad I've been, I'm glad I've seen it for myself, I'm glad I've done something to try and help our neighbours who are very vulnerable for whatever reason. Jesus was very clear on this Matthew 22:39 – Love your neighbour as yourself.

Their faces will never leave me, their warmth in spite of the adversity, their amazing generosity and hopefulness despite everything they've been through. They are not our enemies. They are our friends and neighbours in desperate need. I thank God I could lend a hand. You can too.



In Isaiah 43 it says- when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

It is my prayer that we remember Jesus was a refugee, who had to leave his homeland and flee to Egypt, when he was a baby, with his mother, Mary and father Joseph.

Lord of the vulnerable,

Make us aware of the needs of others,

Help us to understand the fear and anxiety, difficulties and uncertainty that all refugees and migrants suffer,

May we never forget that we all belong to the same human family,

Give us compassion and courage to help in any way we can. Amen.