

As I struggled to decide what to say to you this morning, I kept thinking,

How will I justify the death of thousands of people with a half an hour of words?

Genocide: the intentional destruction of a targeted group of people. The most popular example of this is probably the Holocaust. I'm sure all of you know about the deliberate slaughter that took place in Europe in the 1940s. What do you think of when you think of these times? Injustice? Evil? Devastation?

When I first learned about the Holocaust years ago, I remember thinking, "thank god that could never happen TODAY", with the innocent belief that all of humanity had somehow become morally reborn by learning from the past. To be honest, a part of me still believed that, up until that morning a few months ago when reality hit me and I was informed of the genocide occurring in Africa. However, I clearly still maintain some morsel of hope within me because I am speaking with you today.

Just out of curiosity, have any of you heard of the situation occurring in Darfur?

If you look at the first picture of your bulletin, you can see that the nation of Sudan is located in the eastern part of Africa, and Darfur, in the second picture, is within Sudan, outlined in red.

Within Darfur, there are two main groups of people: Black-Arabs and Black-Africans. The Black Africans make up most of the farming communities who suffer from starvation and famine due to the "scorched earth" or arid, dry land that is incapable of producing decent crops. The farmers are angry with the government in the Sudan for neglecting their suffering and hardship.

The government is made up of the Black-Arabs who believe that any non-Arabs, including the Black African farmers, should be destroyed. Although the government denies it, it supports and finances Arab-militias that were formed to attack the farming communities. These militias were given the name Janjaweed, which translates literally to "devils on horseback". The Janjaweed have raped thousands of women, created over 2.5 million refugees, and used organized starvation and mass execution to murder more than 400,000 people. Thousands more die every month. The conflict began in July 2003 and continues today, and it has officially been declared a genocide by the U.S.

We thought the best way to convey the conditions in Darfur would be to pass on the words of a woman who is actually experiencing them. In her own words, here's her story:

"Sometimes we go to collect grass, which we sell in the market to buy things we need for our children. The Janjaweed send two people and the rest of them set up an ambush. They stop their car on a hill. Some of them act as guards. The two people then approach us and when we see them we run.

Some of us succeed to flee and some are caught and taken to be raped- group raped. Maybe around 20 men rape one woman. They don't care. Last time a number of women got caught and I don't know what they had done to them - we ran.

These things are normal for us here in Darfur, these things happen all the time. It doesn't matter who sees them raping the women, they don't care. They rape women in front of their mothers and fathers."



- Hawa Bakheit Adam, 35 year old woman of the Masalit ethnic community, from Habila, West Darfur

I think one of the most disturbing things I saw pertaining to the rape in Darfur was in a movie that we watched in school, which included first hand accounts. A Sudanese woman in Darfur was asked why the women collect firewood if every time they leave the refugee camp they were in danger of being raped and she responded that a man would be killed if he were found by the janjaweed, while a woman would "only" be raped.

If you look at your bulletin, there's a picture of a girl with a blue shawl. She's lifting it up to reveal a mark on her arm. This mark was left by the teeth of the Janjaweed after they raped her. Their purpose for the bite mark was to brand the girl, and shame her so everyone in her community would know she had been raped and see her as a disgrace.

We first learned about Darfur in our Current Issues class at the High School. Our teacher's lecture really moved us but the one thing his presentation lacked was direction and a call to action. We walked out of the auditorium not knowing what we could possibly do, feeling as though we were simply two teenage girls with no power over the world. We both grew up in this congregation and we know the capabilities of its people. Not individually but together we can all make something change. No burden is to be set on your shoulders, but you all know that the power of a congregation is much stronger than the power of one.

Our UCC faith statement reads, "You call us into your church to resist the powers of evil." Together, we can.

Closing for Josh:

As we pass along the offering plate this morning, I hope we can keep in mind that what we cannot pay by means of money, can be paid with hard work and determination. Josh and his youth group are a great example of what a desire to help and a source of purpose can bring. According to the quote on the back of our Habitat for Humanity t-shirts, "The difference between good and great is an inspired idea and perspiration on your shirt."