

14th May 2023 – Morning Service
Christian Aid Sunday – United by Hope
Adapted from Christian Aid Resources

[If being used as a service in church, if possible, first show the Christian Aid video – United by Hope]

Call to Worship

On this Christian Aid Sunday, Jesus welcomes us all: the young and the old; the lost and the found; the nervous and the confident; the lukewarm and the enthusiastic; the lonely and the overcrowded; the tired and the energetic; the new and the long-standing; those who have little and those who have a lot. **Jesus welcomes us all.**

Opening Prayer

Lord God, gardener of Eden, who flung stars into space and nurtures the tiniest plant, lift our hopes and dreams above the loss and damage of our suffering planet, that we might share your long-dreamed vision which values the pea as much as the plant. Fill us with your life-giving hope and inspire us with your creative Spirit now, and in the age to come. **Amen**

StF 89 – Strength will rise

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
We will wait upon the Lord,
We will wait upon the Lord.
Our God, You reign forever.
Our hope, our strong deliverer.

You are the everlasting God,
The everlasting God,
You do not faint, you won't grow weary.
You're the defender of the weak,
You comfort those in need,
You lift us up on wings like eagles.

Benton Brown & Ken Riley © 2005 Thankyou Music

CCL No. 515642

Reading: Joel 1:10-12 & 2:18-29 (Interspersed with Christian Aid focus for 2023)

Narrator: Meet Esther Saizi from Malawi. After her husband died, she was struggling to provide for her family. She could not stand up to big corporation exploitation. And the effects of the climate crisis made the situation worse. Now, the rainfall is unreliable, and there are more storms, flooding and stronger winds.



Voice 1: The fields are devastated: the ground mourns.

Voice 2: For the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails.

Voice 3: Be dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vine-dressers, over the wheat and the barley;

Voices 1 & 2: For the crops of the field are ruined.

Voice 3: The vine withers, the fig tree droops. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up.

Voices 1 & 2: Surely, joy withers away among the people.

Narrator: But Esther has been working with Christian Aid. They have supported her to grow a new, versatile crop – pigeon peas - which copes better with the problems associated with the changes in climate. In addition, with the help of Christian Aid they have formed cooperatives to secure a fairer price. This enables her to boost the quality of her seeds which in turn gives a better yield. They have added value by baking and selling bread made from pea flour and built warehouses to keep peas safe from weather events.



Voice 1: Then the Lord became jealous for the land, and had pity on the people.
Voice 2: In response to the people, the Lord said; I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a mockery among the nations.
Voice 1: Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!
Voice 2: Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green.
Voice 3: The tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield.
Voice 1: O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God.
Voice 2: For God has given the early rain for your vindication, abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.
Voice 3: The threshing-floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
Voice 1: I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you.
Voice 2: You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.
Voices 1&3: And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Narrator: With this support from Christian Aid to develop her pigeon pea business and get a fair price for her crop and goods, Esther has been able to send her grandson to school and to help her daughter and son-in-law to start a carpentry business – as well as helping others in her community. Together with Christian Aid – hopes and dreams have become a reality.



Voice 3: Then afterwards, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.
Voice 1: Your children shall prophesy.
Voice 2: Your elders shall dream dreams.
Voice 3: And your youth shall see visions.
Voice 1: Even on the enslaved ones.
All voices: In those days, I will pour out my spirit.

[If being used as a service in church, if possible, give out a pigeon pea to everyone during the following song. If this is being read at home, you might like to find yourself a small pea, lentil, bean, etc for the reading and the reflection that follows this song.]

Song – Lord you hear the cry

- 1) Lord, you hear the cry of the widow weeping;
Lord, you hear the cry of the child ill-treated;
Lord, you hear the cry of the depressed
one sinking;
Lord, have mercy on us, Lord have mercy on us.
- 2) Lord, you hear the sound of the proud
ones laughing;
Lord, you hear the sound of the childless hoping;
Lord, you hear the sound of those in debt
and struggling;
Lord, have mercy on us, Lord have mercy on us.
- 3) Lord, you hear the sound of the addict craving;
Lord, you hear the sound of the greed
of nations;
Lord, you hear the sound of the
martyrs praying;
Lord, have mercy on us,
Lord, have mercy on us.
- 4) Lord, we hear the sound of your kingdom
coming;
Resurrection Day for creation groaning.
Mercy I receive, pouring out in loving;
Lord, have mercy on us,
Lord, have mercy on us.

*Ch) Break the heavens, Lord, you said the poor are not forgotten.
Let your justice roar in mighty waves across the earth.
Come and whisper peace, O God of generous compassion.
Lord, have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us.*

Geraldine Latty © Jubilate Hymns CCL No. 515642

Reading: Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

Reflection

(Imagine) You are holding in your hand a pigeon pea. Take a moment to reflect on its size – they are small but each one is packed with enormous power.

Our understanding of the Kingdom of God comes from Jesus, who arrived as a tiny baby but had within him the power to tackle problems so enormous that in Joel’s words “*even the ground mourns.*” By the time Jesus shares two verses about a mustard seed, the unfolding of the Kingdom of God is underway. Jesus has his friends – the disciples - and a growing number of followers but the scribes and the Pharisees are unwelcoming. The threat to what Jesus is trying to achieve is increasing – not everyone understands.

Jesus came because humanity needed to understand how the Kingdom works so that God’s will can be done on earth as in heaven. The many stories or parables Jesus told his followers were often small but are packed with power. In the Parable we heard today, as in life, the Mustard seed is small – much smaller than the pigeon pea you are holding. Despite its size the mustard seed in relative terms becomes quite a large plant – more a shrub than a tree. A common sight when and where Jesus spoke, the plant has substance: it is tough, grows strongly, spreads regardless of the conditions and birds thrive on its tiny seeds.

Transfer this image to the kingdom then and we can say that although it starts small, it grows strongly, is able to provide support, withstands difficult conditions; like the plant rather than a single tree, the kingdom spreads multiplying so that one becomes two and so on. It is an understatement to say that those who heard the Mustard Seed Parable all those years ago from Jesus, were not quick to catch on. When they did get the message they took the seed Jesus planted in their minds and hearts and grew. They were able to support one another and draw others to them.

Despite often horrendous conditions the impact of that first seed travelled across centuries and continues today to inspire to action those willing to understand.

Christian Aid listened to Jesus and understood: in Malawi they have helped by introducing individuals like Esther to the right seed which has made powerful changes, not just to one person but to many.

Esther describes the impact of her small but significant agricultural work as “a tree” – the pigeon peas become the trunk, the branches are the many ways that her family and community are supported.

The Pigeon Pea you are holding is not just Good News for Esther but should be hope and inspiration to action for us all. It only takes the right seed to bring powerful change.

Look again at the pea in your hand...

I wonder how the work begun in Malawi with Esther and her community will continue to grow?

I wonder what might grow in this place from the message within the pigeon peas we hold today?

Prayer of Confession

We say sorry for those many times when we have not recognized the value within the tiny seed, the small but powerful changes which can make a substantial difference.

We say sorry because you have taught us how small things can grow and yet we often don't recognize the small changes which we can make or can help others to make which have the power to bring long lasting change to our lives, to their lives and to your precious creation.

Creator God, once again, you have planted the seed of love in our hearts, in our souls, in our lives. We draw near today in the knowledge that your forgiveness waters the seed and nurtures us with the power of your Spirit to grow, to flourish and to bear the fruit of your justice now and forevermore. **Amen**

StF 693 – Beauty for brokenness

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| 1) Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset Your kingdom increase. | 3) Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain. |
| 2) Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who
can't speak. | 4) Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
Plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need. |
| Ch) <i>God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray,
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.</i> | 5) Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until Your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of Your ways,
Seek Your salvation and bring You their praise. |

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Offertory Prayer

Lord God, our Farmer, you plant the seed; you water the seed; you nourish the seed; you value the widow's mite; you value Esther's pigeon peas; you value what we bring today. What we bring today is already yours. Accept these, our offerings and use them to help dreams come true in this community through this church and in your world through Christian Aid. **Amen.**

Christian Aid – United by Hope

Esther Saizi told Christian Aid: 'When my husband passed away last year, it was a difficult period. I was heartbroken by his passing. Eventually as I knelt down and prayed to God, I knew he was with him and I had to move forward. I knelt and prayed that God would help me.'

Christian Aid believes in life before death. The charity seeks to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, who commanded his followers to love their neighbour and work for a better world. Active in 37 countries, Christian Aid is committed to working alongside the most vulnerable and excluded people of the world, both in times of crisis and for the longer term. Christian Aid gives people survival essentials when they are without shelter or refuge, and helps them find the strength and resources they need to flourish and protect themselves from shocks and disasters. They support people to stand up for their rights and to build stable, secure lives that they can enjoy living.

Christian Aid believes that everyone is equal in the sight of God. For over 75 years, this truth has inspired Christian Aid to stand together in solidarity with our most marginalised global neighbours, of all faiths and none. Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of their dignity and lets injustice thrive. Christian Aid seeks to eradicate extreme poverty by tackling its root causes. Together with people living in poverty, they amplify their voices to speak truth to power and create lasting change, giving people dignity, equality and justice. Together with our help, they aim to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

Christian Aid believes that our voices and actions are stronger together. Together, we have great influence and impact. Christian Aid calls people to pray with them, to act, to give, and to get involved with them in a variety of ways. They work to educate and mobilise people from all kinds of backgrounds to build a movement that can change the course of history and bring social justice to all. They campaign to ensure a more equal division of power in the world, promoting the rights and voices of women and girls – and anyone discriminated against because of who they are. They push our political leaders to tackle climate change and tax dodging – which hit the poorest the hardest – and for our society to welcome those who have been forced to flee their homes overseas.

Christian Aid believes in a creative, loving God. Everything they do is rooted in their Christian beliefs. The charity's campaigning work is driven by love and a desire for social justice. Their belief that poverty can be ended is based on their understanding of scripture and the life of Jesus, who proclaimed the good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed. Through his life, teaching, death and resurrection, called his followers to love God, love their neighbours and to seek justice for those who are oppressed.

Prayers of Intercession

The world we experience is broken by suffering, injustice and sinfulness. Relationships between people, communities, corporations and nations are distorted by inequalities of power. As a result, we are confronted by the scandal of poverty and the degradation of creation. However, the hope offered by Christian Aid is founded on God's promise of a world without poverty where everyone has life in all its fullness. They believe the world can be restored and transformed, and that God is calling them, and us, to speak and act prophetically to bring change. The issues Christian Aid work on are complex. But they are sustained by the confidence that God is with us, revealing to us good ways of living together. They are therefore committed to working and praying for God's will to 'be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

And so we turn to a time of prayer ...

Creator God, you have planted the seed of love in our hearts, in our souls, in our lives. We long for the brightness of your presence, drawing ever closer to you and to one another, as we join with your people at all times in all places to pray.

We cry out for the challenge of soaring inflation making it difficult to afford everyday essentials...[Silence]
 We cry out for people affected by natural disasters such as drought, famine and flood...[Silence]
 We cry out for the impact of climate change, particularly when it destroys essential crops...[Silence]
 We cry out for Esther Saizi and women like her who bring their communities together...[Silence]
 We cry out for farmers who provide essential food for their communities...[Silence]
 We cry out for cooperatives which give people more power over their own lives...[Silence]
 We cry out for an end to the economic exploitation by big businesses...[Silence]
 And we cry out for those who are known to us who are need of your love, peace and comfort...[Silence]
 Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 663 – I the Lord of sea and sky

1) I, the Lord of sea and sky,
 I have heard my people cry;
 All who dwell in dark and sin
 My hand will save.
 I, who made the stars of night,
 I will make their darkness bright.
 Who will bear my light to them?
 Whom shall I send?

2) I, the Lord of snow and rain,
 I have borne my people's pain;
 I have wept for love of them
 They turn away.
 I will break their hearts of stone,
 Give them hearts for love alone;
 I will speak my word to them.
 Whom shall I send?

Ch) *Here I am, Lord.
 Is it I, Lord?
 I have heard You calling in the night.
 I will go, Lord,
 If You lead me;
 I will hold Your people in my heart.*

3) I, the Lord of wind and flame,
 I will tend the poor and lame,
 I will set a feast for them
 My hand will save.
 Finest bread I will provide
 Till their hearts are satisfied;
 I will give my life to them.
 Whom shall I send?

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Blessing

Go into the world working together for change so that everyone can thrive and share life in its fullness.
 And in all we do let us show the love of Jesus.
 When we treat everyone with dignity - **we show the love of Jesus.**
 When we stand up for equality - **we show the love of Jesus.**
 When we fight for justice - **we show the love of Jesus.**
 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**