

**A service for 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2026 – Christian Aid (StF)**

**Call to worship: Micah Ch. 6 vs. 8**

<sup>8</sup> He has showed you, people, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Amen.

*Our opening hymn reminds us of our constant need for the light of God's love to guide us. It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'*

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,**

**Longing for truth, we turn to you.**

**Make us your own, your holy people,**

**Light for the world to see. *Chorus:***

*Christ, be our Light!*

*Shine in our hearts,*

*Shine through the darkness.*

*Christ be our Light!*

*Shine in your Church gathered today.*

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.**

**Longing for hope, many despair.**

**Your word alone has power to save us.**

**Make us your living voice. *Chorus:***

**3. Longing for food, many are hungry.**

**Longing for water, many still thirst.**

**Make us your bread, broken for others,**

**Shared until all are fed. *Chorus:***

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.**

**Longing for warmth, many are cold.**

**Make us your building, sheltering others,**

**Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:***

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,**

**Many the hearts that yearn to belong.**

**Let us be servants to one another,**

**Making your kingdom come. *Chorus:***

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

***Let us Pray.***

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 worship and to serve. Thank you for this wonderful planet upon which we live, for all you give us and do for us and especially for the life, death and resurrection of our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ, through whom the power of sin and death has been broken and by whom we are offered eternal life through faith in him, not anything we can earn by our works, not anything we deserve. Lord, your grace and goodness are amazing, so we offer you our adoration today.

Merciful Lord, we confess those frequent times when we have been stony ground, too hard to value the tiny seed, the generous smile, the heartfelt word. We often fail to

value the generosity of your love and fail to respond with all our heart, mind and strength by caring for our neighbours. We seek more than we need, are careless in responding to the needs of others, tacitly accepting a world that smothers the dreams of those with less power and wealth. Forgive us for our failure to love our neighbours and kindle our hearts with the desire to change our ways.

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. Guide us with the selfless example of Christ Jesus, so we be a blessing to our neighbours in his holy name. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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 next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.***

***Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'***

**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!**

**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. *Chorus:***

***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.***

**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. *Chorus:***

**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. *Chorus:***

**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. *Chorus: © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)***

***We come with our prayer of intercession for our world. Let us pray.***

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us this wonderful, fruitful and self-sustaining world and for all the blessings we receive from you. Help us to serve our neighbours as your earthly hands, doing good as often as we can to as many people as we can for as long

as we can. However, situations we face are often beyond our powers, but not yours, for nothing is impossible to you. Therefore, when the best we can offer is inadequate, warm the hearts of people who possess such wisdom, wealth and power, so they may bring about healing in our broken world.

Lord, thank you for the peace and security we enjoy, for we know that so many countries are suffering from poverty and injustice. The rise in inflation, food and energy costs is pushing many people in our community into poverty, so we thank you for food banks, breakfast and holiday clubs which provide needy children with meals. We are aware, too, that the Developing World has been severely affected by the rising cost of everyday essentials, especially in countries affected by drought, famine, flooding and earthquakes, most of which are the effects of climate change because we have failed in our stewardship of the earth.

We pray for people in the Developing World, where resources are few, where food and water are difficult to obtain and where people struggle to survive. Thank you for the resilience of **Fridah Morah** and her neighbours as they find new ways to feed and support their families. Thank you, too, for **James Omwanda**, who works for Beacon of Hope and leads project to give hope to the community. Today we ask you to bless Christian Aid, all who work for it and support its work to provide brothers and sisters in the Developing World with desperately-needed aid and advocates to end the exploitation of many poorer countries by Big Business and governments. May it receive the support in gifts and prayers to continue and develop the great work it has done since 1945.

We remember people who are sick, lonely, bowed down by the pressures of life, failed relationships and bereavement. In a time of silence, we bring our concerns for them to you, confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know their needs and reach out to them. ....

Gracious Lord, where it is possible let us be part of the answer to our prayer, by being sensitive to their needs and offering them practical support. However, enfold them in the warmth of your love that they be healed, comforted and receive hope, courage and a lasting peace.

Lord, thank you for the peace and security we enjoy, for we know that so many countries are afflicted by warfare and terrorism. We pray for the peace of the world, particularly in Ukraine, and Sudan, where conflict is having a direct effect on food security, for an end to the blockade of the Straits of Hormuz which threatens vital supplies to much of the world, for Afghanistan where the obduracy of the Taliban is making it difficult for food aid to be delivered. We pray for the governments of the nations, that they may act justly and mercifully, for without justice and compassion there can be no real peace. Gracious God, remember the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice, that they will receive justice and healing and can rebuild their lives in hope and security. May peace begin in our hearts, so we live out what we ask for the world. may bear a Christian witness by offering peace for hostility and loving-kindness for hatred.

Lord our Redeemer, we pray for this church, churches in our Circuit, neighbouring circuits and, indeed the World Church, that we learn to take Good News to all peoples in words and deeds of love. Unite us in outreach and help us bear the gospel light to a world darkened by materialism, want and selfishness. Grant us faith to answer our call to serve the risen Lord.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care, help us lead Christ-centred lives by sharing your abundant love with friends and strangers alike, so we glorify the name of Jesus our Saviour and Friend. Amen.

*We are going to sing a hymn written in 1974 by Bryn Rees, a Congregational Minister who served mainly in Eastern and South Eastern England. It has four common settings, which makes it an organist's nightmare. However, the melody 'Tetherdown' was composed by Gerald Barnes, the organist at Tetherdown URC, in Muswell Hill, London, when Revd. Rees was minister, so that is my choice for today. We shall sing hymn number 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy,'*

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,  
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,  
And all things cry glory to God all in all!**

© Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}

**The New Testament reading is Acts chapter 17 verses 22 to 31**

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said:

"People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives everybody life and breath and everything else.

From one man he made every nation of people, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that human beings would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by people's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." Amen.

**Address 1** *'From one man he made every nation of people, that they should inhabit the whole earth;'* Acts 17:26

In our reading, Paul addressed the philosophers and scholars of Athens in an arena called the Areopagus, where debates were held. He put forward his case for the Greeks to receive and accept the Christian faith, abandoning the idols and altars of the gods they worshipped. He observed that they had an altar inscribed 'To an unknown God' and declared that this 'unknown God' had created the world and all life on it. God had

created humankind to prosper and reach out to him. This 'unknown God' wants us to reach out and find him, to repent, that is to turn to him and worship him. Paul added that the Lord had sent a man, Jesus, to judge the world and had proved this by raising Christ from the dead. Sadly, Paul did not win over many Athenians, but one sentence was of great importance. **'From one man he made every nation of people, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live'**.

Paul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, might have been expected to reserve God's blessing for only Jews, but his words extend it to all peoples instead. The Lord is God of everyone and he loves everyone. This truth led to the work of Christian Aid which was born at the end of the Second World War when forty-one churches in Britain and Ireland decided to work together to help refugees and starving people in Europe. In the 1950s, Christian Aid Week was begun to raise funds to help refugees from Palestine, Korea and China and reaching out to help them to sustain themselves. During the 1960s, it founded the Disasters Emergency Committee to address issues in Africa and South East Asia and supported Dr. Martin Luther King's campaign against racism and poverty in the USA.

Christian Aid fed people during the Ethiopian famine in 1985, sported Mozambique during a terrible drought and campaigned against Apartheid. In the next decade it linked work in 50 poor countries to campaigns on developing world debt, fair trade and the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, challenged the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa and it stood up for and provided food for refugees in Kosovo.

Christian Aid campaigned to make poverty history during a war against terror and reached more than 500,000 people with food, shelter and healthcare after the Asian Tsunami. The charity publicised that developing countries lose more money through the tax evasion practices of large corporations than they receive through official aid and campaigns against climate change. It continues to work with local partners on the ground to make a practical difference to the lives of new waves of refugees locally while campaigning and advocating for change globally.

Above all else, Christian Aid extends God's love to all who suffer poverty, injustice and exploitation, showing the power of churches when they set aside difference of denomination and work together for Christ. Amen.

*The author of our next hymn, Martin Leckebusch, is a Maths graduate from Oxford University, who is an IT worker or Infrastructure Architect for a major bank. Although he began as a Methodist, he is now an elder at a Baptist Church in Gloucester. We shall sing hymn number 713, 'Show me how to stand for justice'*

**1. Show me how to stand for justice:**

**how to work for what is right,  
how to challenge false assumptions,  
how to walk within the light.**

**May I learn to share more freely  
in a world so full of greed,  
showing your immense compassion  
by the life I choose to lead.**

**2. Teach my heart to treasure mercy,  
whether given or received –  
for my need has not diminished**

since the day I first believed:  
let me seek no satisfaction  
boasting of what I have done,  
but rejoice that I am pardoned  
and accepted in your Son.

3. Gladly I embrace a lifestyle  
modelled on your living word,  
in humility submitting  
to the truth which I have heard.  
Make me conscious of your presence  
every day in all I do:  
by your Spirit's gracious prompting  
may I learn to walk with you.

© *Martin E Leckebusch (born 1962)*

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 13 verses 18 to 20**

Then Jesus asked,

"What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." Amen.

**Address 2: "The mustard seed and yeast" Luke 13:18 – 20**

The parables of the mustard seed and the small measure of yeast were meant to show how a small amount of faith can grow exponentially with the might of the Holy Spirit, or how a small group of followers were able to grow into a huge, unstoppable Church a tree that allowed birds to shelter in its branches – in other words, a church that accommodates all-comers, not just an exclusive few. The tree represents the kingdom of God, not a country or continent but everywhere that God's will is done and love reigns supreme. However, if that mustard seed represents our gift, small though it may be, when combined with the offerings of others, it will make a big difference. Like a small amount of yeast, our gift can help feed many. It is a gift that keeps on giving. Let me explain.

Christian Aid provides more than food in emergencies. It provides seeds, livestock, tools and equipment for people to grow their own food. It sources wells that provide regular supplies of clean water to irrigate crops as well as domestic needs. Christian Aid employs workers to train communities to use the equipment and farm sustainably, even in arid and challenging parts of the world. Success is measured by the numbers of people who are enabled to live independently and whose children are able to attend school until their mid to late teens.

Despite the skyscrapers and luxury safaris, Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, has areas of great deprivation, in which most people are living on less than a dollar a day, as a result of which many families regularly go without meals. Poverty and the climate crisis have forced thousands to leave the land to search for work in the city. They find it hard to grow food for their families, let alone pay for education and health care. Many of them live in what are called 'informal settlements', a polite term for shanty towns that often lack running water or electricity.

In one of these settlements, Dagoretti, Christian Aid is partnering an organization, Beacon of Hope to grow hope for the future. James Omwanda works for Beacon of Hope, leading the farming project. He is passionate about the faith that motivates him

and what the project can achieve. People who attend lessons say James is the reason they learn so much. Beacon of Hope uses a simple, but very effective system of vertical, or pyramid farming to grow abundant food in tiny city spaces. James and fellow-workers train communities to make and maintain cone gardens in what little space they have.

Cone gardens are cones made with a series of concentric rings filled with earth with produce grown on every level. People are trained as city farmers, by giving them skills, seeds, tools and space-saving ways to grow produce near their homes. Even a metal fence can be used to grow climbing plants and old containers can be turned into planters. One of the community, Fridah Moraa, is a widow, mother of three and grandmother of a four-year-old grandson. She has learned to use cone gardens to grow food for her family and produces enough to sell some in the local market. However, if there aren't enough customers, Fridah will skip meals, so her children can eat. With grit and determination, supported by Beacon of Hope, she is studying hard. Lessons cover not only farming techniques, such as pest management, compost production, and seed cultivation, but also business skills, including money management and how to sell.

Fridah is now beginning to reap the benefits of her nutritious produce. Colourful kale, tomatoes and a range of local vegetables are now being sold on her market stall and fed to her family. From living meal to meal, not knowing if her children will go to bed with empty stomachs, she now cherishes the security her small urban farm is bringing. She is even saving some money, which she hopes one day will pay for her children to go to college. Farmers like Fridah and leaders like James are turning the tide on poverty. Both of them maintain a quiet, steady faith, trusting fully in God's plan for the community even in challenging times. Two features of Christian Aid that I love are different churches and different denominations are working together to give practical, lasting support to the world's poor without strings attached and their policies enable people to become self-sufficient, to teach others what they have learned and expand their blessings as grains of yeast develop dough. In his hymn, "The Church of Christ in every age", Revd. Fred Pratt Green wrote the verse, '**Across the world, across the street, / The victims of injustice cry / For shelter and for bread to eat, / And never live until they die.**' By giving what we can, we give people like Fridah and her community the chance to live before they die! **Let us live faithfully, prayerfully and generously, seeking to build God's kingdom on unbreakable foundations of love. Amen.**

*Our closing hymn is Sydney Carter's, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' which he wrote in 1965. You may not know that, during the 1950s and 60s, Sydney worked as a lyricist for Donald Swann in the famous revues of Flanders and Swann. Just think, we could be singing, 'The Hippopotamus Song'! Instead, let us stand and sing, hymn number 256, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?'*

**1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?**

**When I needed a neighbour, were you there? Chorus:**

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,*

*Were you there?*

**2. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?**

**I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? Chorus:**

**3. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?**

**I was cold, I was naked, were you there? Chorus:**

**4. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?**

**When I needed a shelter, were you there? *Chorus:***

**5. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?**

**When I needed a healer, were you there? *Chorus:***

**6. Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,**

**Wherever you travel, I'll be there, *Chorus:***

***And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,***

***I'll be there.***

© Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}

### **Benediction**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.