

## A service for 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 Christian Aid (StF)

### Call to worship: Psalm 148 verses 1 to 6

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. Amen.

*As we gather in God's presence, let us sing a hymn by Folliot Sandford Pierpoint, who was ordained in the Church of England before taking a post as classics master at Somerset College. This hymn was intended to be a communion hymn and was said to have been inspired by the view from a hill in Bath which filled the author with awe. Hymn number 102, 'For the beauty of the earth'.*

1. For the beauty of the earth,  
For the beauty of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth

Over and around us lies: *Chorus:*

*Gracious God, to Thee we raise  
This our sacrifice of praise.*

2. For the beauty of each hour  
Of the day and of the night,  
Hill and vale and tree and flower,  
Sun and moon, and stars of light: *Chorus*

3. For the joy of ear and eye,  
For the heart and mind's delight,  
For the mystic harmony  
Linking sense to sound and sight: *Chorus*

4. For the joy of human love,  
Brother, sister, parent, child,  
Friends on earth and friends above,  
Pleasures pure and undefiled: *Chorus*

5. For each perfect gift of Thine  
To our race so freely given;  
Graces human and divine,  
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven. *Chorus*      *F.S. Pierpoint (1835 – 1917)*

***Let us pray. We begin with a gathering prayer.***

Creator, Son and Spirit, we gather together to seek Your presence in our time of worship.

### **WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOU**

Meet us at our point of deepest need. Connect us with the needs of others.  
Equip us to join in your creative work. Transform us more into your likeness.

### **WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

We gather with Jessica and Janet  
and their communities in Zimbabwe this Christian Aid Week. May their stories make  
us hungry for justice and even more impatient for change.

### **WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOUR JUSTICE**

We gather with all of creation; with the mountains and the hills. We shall burst into song, with the trees of the field we will clap our hands.

**WE ARE HUNGRY TO PRAISE YOU. AMEN.**

### **A Prayer of confession**

Good God of creation, we sing praise to you. But even as we raise our voices we know we have faltered and failed. Walking on paths that turned our hearts inward, sitting with those who scoffed at the cries of people in poverty, mocking those on the margins, denying the earth in her distress.

Too often our leaves have withered our branches are barren. We have failed to be pruned and the axe is now poised. Poised to cut down the excesses that crucify all creation, the systems that impoverish all people, the privileges that diminish our faith. But even now it is not too late.

For in the face of judgement comes the offer of grace and the hope that deadwood can spring to life.

Where we have failed to bear good fruit and share your abundance for the earth;

**GOD HAVE MERCY**

When our actions and intentions have been as chaff for the winds of heaven

**GOD HAVE MERCY**

Forgive us. Restore us. Inspire us now to delight in your purposes, to embrace your possibilities, to inhabit your promises, to flourish as fruit for the world you so love and bring healing for all the nations. **AMEN.**

***We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:***

**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.**

***Address: Jessica and Janet***

This year's Christian Aid Appeal features two Zimbabwean women who are trying to provide enough food for their families. Jessica Mwedzi says that when food is scarce, she can only give her children one bowl of porridge a day. For Jessica, drought means every day is a struggle for survival. Like many women in Zimbabwe, she toils on her farm, but no food can grow on her ashen dry land. 'One year, they has no rain, so the scorching sun burnt the crops just as they were about to bloom.

It's unjust that drought robs Jessica of the power to provide for her family. Her husband is unwell, so she is the only breadwinner. Once before, when things were desperate, Jessica asked her neighbours for food, but they had nothing themselves.

Jessica is hungry. Hungry for a good meal. Hungry to earn a decent living. Hungry to provide a more hopeful future for her family.

You can help this loving mother turn hunger into hope. Your gift this Christian Aid Week could help Jessica grow seeds that thrive in the drought. In the months to come, she'll turn these seeds into fresh food like tomatoes, beans and cucumbers to sell and feed her family. She'll have the joy of seeing her children grow up happy and healthy.

Janet Zirugo, 70, has a big heart. Many of the children in her family are orphans, and she is their sole provider. In her village in Zimbabwe, Janet has seen how drought pushed her family into desperate hunger when they ate things which they wouldn't eat in normal times. Her heart was so painful thinking that her family would die. By God's grace they did not die.

With faith, hope and love, Janet brought her family through this painful time. Thanks to Christian Aid, she was given drought-resistant seeds that can grow in this harsh climate. You'll be happy to know her farm is now bursting with life. Now, she is strong and resilient. With all her strength, she works on her farm so her family never again go hungry. She has built a storeroom to keep her harvest safe and secure, to help her bounce back in future droughts. She knows when changes are coming and can adapt before crisis hits.

'My life is changing,' she says. 'This project is lifting us up. We are thankful. It makes me happy to see my family are strong and well fed.'

As she reflects on how her life has changed, Janet sings with joy. We rejoice with her.

*We continue our worship with a hymn possibly written by Roy Crabtree in 1999. We shall sing it through twice. Hymn number 242, 'A new commandment'*

**A new commandment**

**I give unto you:**

**That you love one another**

**As I have loved you,**

**That you love one another**

**As I have loved you.**

**By this shall all know**

**That you are my disciples**

**If you have love one for another.**

**By this shall all know**

**That you are my disciples**

**If you have love one for another.**

*Anonymous / Ray Crabtree*

**We come to our prayers of intercession, where we bring our concerns for people nearby and far away to the Lord our God. I shall end each section with a sentence from Revelation chapter 21. Let us pray.**

Creator God, cultivator of our faith, thank you for the privilege of living in this global garden, planted to bear your fruit, to delight our tongues, to fill our bellies, to energise our bodies. You have given us life in all its fullness. You have given us life, yet millions still hunger.

Take these gifts of money and use them to help Christian Aid support communities throughout the world, and partners who hunger to provide. But may our support not end here. May we be the seeds from which your kingdom grows.

In our hunger for peace, we pray in particular for Ukraine as it continues to resist the Russian invasion and for people in its cities who are facing bombardment and terrible privation, for neighbouring countries that are fearful that Russia may strike at them, too. We pray for Sri Lanka which is facing civil unrest. But may our concern for them not stifle our concern for Zimbabwe, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and all those other places to whom our hearts have become hardened through over-familiarity.

**THEY WILL HUNGER NO MORE AND THIRST NO MORE**

In our hunger for justice, we pray for people in this country who are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with increasing energy, food and fuel prices and who are having to choose whether to stay warm or eat. We thank you for those who support and operate foodbanks and for supermarkets to provide surplus food, rather than destroying it. But may our concern for them not stifle our concern for Jessica, Janet and all those known to us who hunger to provide for those they love in our global community.

### **THE SUN WILL NOT STRIKE THEM, NOR ANY SCORCHING HEAT**

In our hunger, we pray for our Queen and Parliament that her Majesty will regain some of her strength and that our MPs will stop playing political games and concentrate upon the needs of the people they serve. We pray for a resolution to the trade border dispute in Ireland and for negotiators working in areas where there are conflicts. But may our concern for them not stifle our concern for your little ones, children who go to bed hungry, whose parents struggle to provide for them in times of desperate drought.

### **GOD WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES**

And in our hunger, we pray that you will fill your Church with your hope, your passion and your life, that we may go out from this place to give, act and pray. So all who hunger to provide may be filled to overflowing.

We ask your blessing on Bridge Court, on all who live and work here, our friends and our families. May your peace rest upon this home and upon us, always.

Abba, heavenly Father, we ask that you will hear and answer our prayer, not as we ask in our ignorance, nor deserve in our sinfulness, but as you know and love us in Christ Jesus our risen Lord. **AMEN.**

***We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:***

**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.**

### **The New Testament reading is Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 6**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said,

"I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To those who are thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. Amen.

### **Our Gospel reading is John chapter 13 verses 31 to 35**

When he was gone, Jesus said,

"Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Amen.

*We shall continue our worship as we sing a hymn written by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. He was the Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London at the time and his organist, Gerald Barnes composed one of four melodies for the hymn which, naturally, is called “Tetherdown”! The alternative settings are ‘Paderborn’, ‘Hanover’ and ‘Haughton’. 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}**

**Sermon: “If anyone loves me, they will obey my teaching.” John14:23**

I was relieved when the local elections were over last week, for I thought there would be no more party-political broadcasts, no more analysis – just post mortems to explain away one party’s success and another’s failure. Clearly, subsequent events show I am not cut out to be a political pundit! I can say with certainty that the visions in the three main party manifestoes are nothing like the one declared by St. John of Patmos nineteen hundred years ago, for our reading from Revelation envisages the New Jerusalem at the end of the ages with God living alongside the faithful in a state of perpetual well-being; an age when suffering and death are banished, evil destroyed and, effectively, the Garden of Eden re-established, with its tree of life and river of the water of life.

Was John talking of an earthly state, or of heaven? Is his vision merely an impossible dream, crumbs of comfort for early Christians as they faced persecution from the Roman Empire? We do well to set aside the pledges by politicians that they will lead us into the Promised Land, or build a New Jerusalem, for they are neither Moses nor the Lamb of God; nor can politics deliver a truly Golden Age, though it can and does affect people’s welfare. If we want a radically better world, we need to look beyond politics, to consider the teaching of Jesus, which calls for justice, mercy and inclusion, rather than vested, or self-interest and exclusivity. How many manifestoes would dare cite the Beatitudes, or produce a mission-statement like Jesus’ at the

beginning of his ministry: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”?**

Much of Jesus’ ministry was centred upon the despised and marginalised in First Century Galilee and Judea, for the gospels record how he offered healing, a new start and reconciliation to tax collectors, fallen women, to the deranged, the crippled, to lepers and outcasts, even to Romans and Samaritans, who Jews passionately despised. Despite the passage of two thousand years, our society is not always tolerant and caring towards our neighbours. Over thirty years have passed since AIDs / HIV cast its shadow over us, yet people with AIDs are still shunned by many – rather like the lepers at the time of Jesus – even though Princess Diana was willing to give them hugs when she met them. Immigration from Eastern Europe, or the wider world, is still a political hot-potato, yet instead of having a reasoned debate of the issues, which would counter claims of some tabloid newspapers, we shy away from it and make life more difficult for newcomers to our shores.

There are still people in this country who argue against providing aid to the Developing World and who will not support the cancelling of overwhelming debts of many of the poorest countries – usually citing ‘Charity begins at home.’ While the Northern Hemisphere is facing a deep fiscal crisis with dramatic increases in fuel, energy and food crops – exacerbated by the war in Ukraine – our plight is relatively insignificant, compared with the poorer Southern half of our world, where more than two hundred thousand children die every week from starvation, water-borne diseases, or lack of medicines. That means every hour one hundred and fifty children will have died because of the effects of poverty. I always feel uncomfortable when I read the parable of Dives and Lazarus, for we will bear the fate of Dives if we remain indifferent to the plight of the world’s poor. The work of organisations like Christian Aid seeks to end this suffering: this is why they need our moral and financial support!

Christian Aid does not simply hand out food: it helps provide wells, so people have clean water and can irrigate their crops. It provides seeds that produce crops that are able to survive drought conditions; provides animals and chickens that can produce milk, eggs and meat that not only feed families but raise income to allow children to pay school fees. Christian Aid offers practical equipment and training to help people like Janet and Jessica support themselves and their families.

At the Last Supper, Jesus reassured his disciples, knowing that his passion, death – and resurrection – were imminent and that his followers were not ready to take the Good News to an unbelieving world. He assured them that he would manifest himself to those who love him – physically to his disciples at the resurrection and in his spiritual presence thereafter. Christ told the disciples that God and he will make their home with anybody who loves him and obeys his teaching. He also gave the commandment, **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** The mark of our discipleship is how we care for both friend and stranger, so supporting Christian Aid is one such manifestation of our commitment.

For centuries Jews prayed, **“Next year in Jerusalem”** – seemingly an impossible dream, yet despite the terrible mess that has resulted, they accomplished their aim in 1967 and declared Jerusalem Israel’s capital in 1980. A world envisaged by St. John might seem beyond our reach, but we’re called to work towards it by

steadfastly sharing Christ's teaching and love in words and deeds – so others recognise Jesus in us and want to find out what makes us different. If they do so, they open the door to their hearts and the Good News can enlighten their lives, too. Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the United Kingdom for 5 years, but now lives in Christchurch, New Zealand and is enjoying the role of vicar's wife! Hymn number 662, 'Have you heard God's voice: has your heart been stirred?'*

**1. Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?**

**Are you still prepared to follow?**

**Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
Though the way be rough and narrow? *Chorus:***

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
And embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
The disciples of tomorrow?*

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:***

**3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?**

**Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:***

**4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
And believe it could be different?**

**Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:***

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
And embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
The disciples of tomorrow.*

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***Benediction.***

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