

Easter 6 and the start of Christian Aid Week: 9th May 2021

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Introduction

For many years Weoley Hill has carried out house to house collections in the streets close to the Church but the rest of the pastorate has done other things. However, this year we are doing things a bit differently. Deliver only envelopes are going out asking people to give online or put the envelopes in the Church letter box. It does not matter which church you attend but please think carefully and give what you can to this worthy cause. I will be using extracts from the Christian Aid worship material.

Jesus said: 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

So, let us join together as friends, Jesus' friends, to worship and serve the one who, because of his great love, gave his all for us.

Hymn: For the fruits of all creation

Prayer of adoration

Let us pray. God of relationships, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together and as one, you draw us into friendship with you that we may draw others. You command us to love as you have love, that we might inspire others. You fill our hearts with the passion of your heart, that we might serve others. You are the truest of friends, the most faithful friend, the most enduring – and we praise you for all you are and more.

Prayer of Confession

For the beauty of the earth desecrated by pollution extinguished by forest fires choked by plastic waste Christ, our God, to you we plead forgive us for systemic greed.

For the urgency of this hour ignored by apathy or procrastination, wasted by ineffective decisions, denied by economic interests, Christ, our God and Saviour, forgive us for selfish short-term behaviour.

For the joy of human love fractured by forced migration crushed by bereavement, lost to typhoons, floods, starvation Christ, our God, bringer of justice, forgive us for this climate crisis.

Absolution

God you know me. You know that I can be loving and kind; and you know that sometimes I get things wrong. I'm sorry for the times I hurt other people, forget to listen to you and don't bother to take care of your world. God forgive you, Jesus bless you. God's Spirit help you to grow in love.

Amen.

God you know us. You know that we can be loving and kind; and you know that sometimes we get things wrong. We're sorry for the times we hurt other people, forget to listen to you and don't bother to take care of your world. God forgive us, Jesus bless us. God's Spirit help us to grow in love.

Saying yes

Because we are God's people, we will care for each other.

Because we are part of God's creation, we will care for the Earth.

Because we are loved by God, we will share God's love with everyone.

Absolution and Saying Yes (*Iona Community Worship Book*, 2017).

Reading: John 15:9-17

Reflection

This is the story of Florence and how she has benefitted from Christian Aid donations.

Florence is full of life, love and laughter. The women in her farming group look up to her. She's courageous, kind – a survivor. A few years ago, her husband died, leaving her a widow. At that time, she had no water to grow crops. Her children were hungry. She had to walk for hours on dangerous journeys to collect water. 'Life was miserable,' she told us. But things have changed for Florence. Next to her farm, Florence is proud of something remarkable – a dam, full of fresh water. It's thanks to your donations that Florence and her community have built this water dam, with the help of our partner Anglican Development Services – Eastern (ADSE), just a short walk away from her village. With this dam, Florence can grow tomatoes, onions and chillies on her farm. With this dam, her children can eat healthy, nutritious vegetables. It's her source of life and joy. Florence also uses the water from the dam to keep bees. She sells the rich, golden honey for cash at the market. Now, Florence is reaping a good life for herself and her family. The dam gives Florence strength to withstand even the most unpredictable weather. It's a reliable water source, whether she faces long drought or relentless rainstorms. Sadly, millions of people in Kenya are

desperately struggling to survive climate chaos. You can help another community build a dam. Many more people will have the water they need to sustain their families. I encourage you to give generously, we can help more people like Florence to thrive.

I hope you have been given an envelope for Christian Aid Week, on it you'll see there is an option to find out more about giving regularly to Christian Aid. Regular giving is vitally important because it is your chance to stand together with the communities we support worldwide and make a lasting difference. A regular gift from you would help us be there for people like Florence in the long term. One off donations via the website, via TapSimple or put in an envelope through the church letter box are also very important.

From the lectionary reading today in verse 11 we are told 'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.' John 15:11

This verse is the purpose statement of this long parting speech from Jesus to his disciples. To speak of joy when he himself is on the threshold of deep trial and suffering is an indication of what joy is. It was for the joy set before him he endured the cross. Despite the suffering of Good Friday and the silence of Holy Saturday, this is a joy that believes that Sunday is coming. This joy does not deny sorrow or suffering but co-exists with them. Jesus' parting words to his disciples are an encouragement to abide in the love of God and dig deep into consistent, wonderful joy. And he knows that they are going to need each other to get through. Their love for one another and their sacrificial giving for their friends will strengthen them to endure. It is not duty, obligation or command that will enable them to remain faithful and bear lasting fruit. It is love, friendship and joy. Love, friendship and joy is what we hope lies at the heart of our experience of Christian Aid Week. We hope that it is our love for one another that inspires our generous giving. That it is our friendship with communities we get to know through the stories of Florence and others that motivates us to sacrificial acts of solidarity. And it through our generous giving and sacrificial actions that we bear lasting fruit and know complete joy. The joy that we participate in and experience in and through Christian Aid Week does not lead us away from suffering and struggle, but towards it. We choose to look towards the pain and see the possibilities for transformation. Jesus goes on to explain to the disciples that even pain will turn to a joy

that no one can remove (John 16:20-22). Alice Walker wrote 'resistance is the secret of our joy'. This Christian Aid Week, as we choose to enter into the struggle with those who are suffering and celebrate transformed communities with Florence, may our joy be complete. Please give what you can to help as an act of love, friendship and joy. Amen

Prayers for the world and its people.

Let us come before God in prayer. God of abundant life, we see your goodness all around us and we thank you for every part of it; from the plants and animals which play their part in complex ecosystems, to the dry deserts and stormy seas which test the limits of life. We pray that in this time of climate crisis and ecological emergency, you may help us to rediscover your love of creation and to reflect that in our own lives. God who speaks through unexpected people. We thank you for contemporary prophets who are challenging us to act on climate change; for indigenous people and their invaluable knowledge of the land and sea where they live, for scientists dedicating their careers to warning us about changes to the planet, and for young people striking for their future. We pray that you will help those in power to hear their prophetic voices. Help them to see beyond short-term political priorities and business plans. and give them wisdom and courage when they face difficult decisions. God of second chances, we recognise the damage we have done to the Earth and the injustice we see in society every day, all of it fuelled by worship of profit and possessions.

We pray for the coming of a better world with justice, kindness and humility at its heart. We ask that you guide us to be co-creators of this new world. Give us confidence to follow the prophetic voices to stand against injustice to people and to planet. So that together, in your strength, we stop this climate crisis.

Gracious Lord we bring before you all these things and also the concerns in our hearts for those who we care for and love. Pause

We ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together. Our Father...

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, we thank you that we can give what we can, in any way that we can, to you and charities such as Christian Aid that do so much good work in the world and have continued to do so through the climate crisis and the pandemic. May God bless all our gifts. amen

Hymn : The Kingdom of God is Justice and joy

Blessing

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory. May God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling. May God bless us with courage at this critical hour. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon us and on all creation, this day and for the future to come. Amen.

Blessing adapted from ACT Alliance

Thanks to Christian Aid worship team for the majority of this material.