

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit**  
**SERVICE AT HOME: 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2022**  
**Christian Aid Sunday.**

**Preparation:** Please take a moment to be silent, and to be present with God in your own way, bearing in mind this is Christian Aid Sunday.

**Call to Worship**

Let us come to the river and be like trees planted by streams of water, putting our roots down deep into God's word, bearing good fruit that will last, not withering from fatigue, stretching out to receive and be a source of healing. **Amen.**

**Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along**

A hymn which sums up well what we need to think about today:

Beauty for Brokenness – StF 693

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D81ZD1NDPyE>

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 (b 1950)

**Prayers of Confession and Thanksgiving**

Good God of creation, we sing praise to you.  
The planet you allow us to live on and everything  
in it over which we have dominion has so much of  
wonder, so much to give us abundant life, we are  
in awe of your generosity, humbled by this, your  
wonderful creation, that provides us with all that  
we need. Our adoration is without measure.

**Amen**

But even as we raise our voices in praise,  
we know we have faltered and failed.  
We have not heard the cries of the poor.  
We have ignored those on the margins.

The warring and selfish ways of mankind create misery for so many, while many are devastated by natural disaster, by problems we perhaps create by our own excesses and lifestyle.

GOD HAVE MERCY.

Forgive us. Restore us. Inspire us 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**

But we know we are forgiven and we give thanks for that huge gift given to us.

We give thanks for those who address the needs of the poorest, for the resources we have to help those less in need, whether in our own islands, or in far-flung parts of the world, brave and caring people who share your all-embracing love for all your people.

We give thanks for those who are there to help us when we are in need, for whatever reason. Your gifts to your people are abundant and we thank you, Lord, for those who seek to ensure that all your people can aspire to a good life despite all that conspires to prevent that.

**Amen**

**Read** Leviticus 19: 9-11, 33.

**Read** Matthew 3: 1-10

**Short Video** – if you have the technology, watch this short video from Christian Aid Week, 2017, about some of what they do with refugees:

<https://youtu.be/DAITJq0enMQ>

## Reflection

It's Christian Aid week and possibly never has it, and sister organisations such as OXFAM and CAFOD, needed it more. We pray so often 'thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven', but the 'on earth' part of that seems to be running away from us at considerable speed at the moment. We are bombarded on a daily basis with news of the horrors in the Ukraine, refugees in so much need, coupled with anger at the failure of our own government to do better with processing

visas when many other countries are not requiring visas at all.

I usually use the lectionary readings for the day, but not today. It's back to Leviticus for exhortations to leave something at the edge of the field for the alien, to treat foreigners in your land well. Verse 33: '*When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them*'. You'll find the same messages in Deuteronomy too. Is this what led the Archbishops of Canterbury and York over Easter to condemn the proposals to ship refugees to Rwanda as 'the opposite of the nature of God'? It is a message which goes back to the very origins of the Torah – the five books at the beginning of the Old Testament which provide the basis for the original Jewish Law, as well as our own.

I well remember Kenneth Greet, a supernumerary minister at the time but a former Secretary of the Methodist Conference and an excellent preacher, taking an evening service at Chandler's Ford and calling for one-handed preachers. This was so they can't use the expression 'on the one hand...' followed by the counter: 'on the other hand...'. Sometimes you have to say what is right and that is what the Archbishops – and, incidentally, all the other major Christian Denominations too – have been trying to do about refugees in recent weeks, whether it be about the Ukraine or Rwanda in addressing different aspects of the refugee issue.

This is Speaking Truth to Power - just like Gandhi, or Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the Russian Communists. Just like John the Baptist in our Gospel reading – a refugee type figure, eating locusts and honey, but challenging religious authorities with the words, 'you brood of vipers', and going on with - '*The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in to the fire.*'

Christian Aid has a history with refugees. I went back and watched a short film from Christian Aid

Week from 2017. It was about what they were doing for Syrian refugees in the Lebanon. There were 1.5 million Syrian refugees in The Lebanon at that point. We tend to forget there are still big, big problems there, and in Afghanistan and the Yemen, to name but three locations. I hesitate to say that people might take the Ukraine situation more seriously because it is white Caucasian people for the most part who are affected. But to be fair it is also probably because it is constantly on the TV.

Much of the law from Leviticus we might balk at. In this same chapter 19 we are told not to trim our beards or to cut the hair on the sides of our head. There are things about sexuality which are controversial today, but this – treating people well, accepting people who are different – is also central to the New Testament teachings of Jesus, who befriended Romans, tax-collectors, prostitutes and even Samaritans – all to the annoyance of the Jewish authorities. In those days, Samaritans were beyond redemption for the Jewish people, which is why the story of the Good Samaritan is such a remarkable and challenging story – two good Jews ignoring the problem, and then a Samaritan doing the right thing. Maybe these days it's people who are 'rescued' by Lifeboats as they make their way across The Channel who are the untouchables.

John the Baptist, in his accusations towards the Sadducees and Pharisees, warns them not to use the notion that *'we have Abraham as our father'*, perhaps a timely reminder about the Abrahamic Faiths, a reminder that Christians, Jews and Muslims all worship the same God, and that Islam recognises Jesus as a prophet. There are Islamic organisations involved too around Foreign Aid, fighting crisis and supporting those in need.

The need is worldwide. I saw a picture last week of some young – about 15 years old – Muslim girls in a refugee camp. You read about displaced people all over the globe and these were Somali girls in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. That astonished me. There are about 200,000 Somalis

in 5 camps in Ethiopia and this one is called Helowyn, with 40,000 people. It still seems fairly recent that Band Aid was focussing on people starving in Ethiopia but that was 1984 – nearly 40 years ago. Although Ethiopia has a fast growing economy, it is still one of the poorest countries in Africa. Perhaps having suffered themselves makes them more likely to help others who are in peril.

But all this is because people matter, irrespective of where they are or what they believe. That Christian Aid film reminded us of the need to do practical things to help people – in unofficial refugee camps in the Lebanon. Children in need of education, men desperate to work so they can support their families, mothers unable to look after their disabled children. So Christian Aid does something about providing some sort of schools, sourcing support for the disabilities they come across, helping desperate people in awful surroundings. This all reminded me of the sort of things that the founders of the Methodist Church – John and Charles Wesley – did about the terrible poverty they came across in the London of their day – there were enormous social needs for all sorts of reasons and they did practical things to alleviate those needs.

But also importantly this is about helping people to help themselves. It's back to the thought that, if you give someone a fish, you feed them for the day, if you teach them how to fish, you feed them for life. This is about dignity as well. People don't want to be spoonfed. They want to be supported towards being self-sufficient. Ukrainian people fleeing the Ukraine will mostly want to return eventually to their own country. They need support in, hopefully, just the short-term. Refugees, wherever they are, want to return to as normal a life as possible. That is what Christian Aid is about, which is surely totally deserving of our support and our prayer.

**Amen**

## Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for our world.

In Christian Aid Week, we ask 'how long'

How long will the bellies of children lie empty?

How long will their mothers pray in vain?

How long will temperatures rise beyond record?

How long will the clouds fail to give rain?

How long will the crop fields turn into dust?

How long will the floods cover the plain?

How long will so few live with far too much?

How long will so many be denied their needs?

How long before the healing of nations?

How long will injustice and suffering remain?

So we pray for Christian Aid and other faith and humanitarian organisations which work together to address these questions, to try to put things right, to help and support the victims of war, of famine, of flood, to bring abundance where there is not enough, enough where there is nothing.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the governments of the world, the leaders of the nations, those who make the decisions to destroy people's homes and cities. We pray for those who support those who find themselves under attack. But most of all we pray for those who seek peace, that peace will prevail, that the lion may lay down with the lamb, that Russia and the Ukraine will find peace, that any land suffering the horrors of war will find an end to devastating conflict.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the government of our own land, where prices rise, where people cannot afford to heat their homes, where mothers and fathers are desperate to provide for their families, or fear for the wellbeing of elderly relatives - that ways will be found to reduce the suffering, to allay fears, to answer the needs of those most under pressure.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Churches and their leaders, the Faith Communities, for those who challenge the authorities, as did Jesus, when they think things are wrong. And we pray for those who give practical support to those in need, addressing poverty, hunger, homelessness, family problems.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for those known to us – our families, friends, people we will meet as we go about our normal business when we have finished here. People at work, people in the shops, people who help us, people we may help. May they all know your love, even if they do not believe in you!

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray especially for those in real need at the moment because of illness, employment worries, financial pressures, or whatever other reasons might make people desperate.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace to make these prayers, answer now your servants' prayers according to their needs; in this world grant that we may truly know you, and in the world to come graciously give us eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord,

**Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

### Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along - StF 487

The trees of the field will clap their hands

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjL27TISwYU>

### Blessing

In the name of God who plants the seed of justice, be hungry.

In the name of Christ who hangs on the tree of love, be fruitful.

And in the name of the Spirit who inspires God's will in our hearts and our lives: be celebrated.

You are Christ's people,  
here and throughout the world  
now and forever.

**Amen**

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Service prepared by David Wrighton.

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