

Christian Aid Sunday

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Bless the Lord, my soul, and forget none of his benefits. – Ps.103,2

Collect:

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass all understanding. Pour into our hearts such love toward you, that we, loving you above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Christian Aid Week film 2021 featuring Florence

A woman sings a deep, joyful tune. Her song lifts the spirits of the other women on the farm. This is Florence. She 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 a dangerous journeys to collect water. 'Life was miserable,' she told us. Florence could easily have been defeated. But Florence is a fighter, and she shows the women in her farming group that they can be fighters, too. Next to her farm, Florence is proud to show us something remarkable – a dam, full of freshwater. It's thanks to Christian Aid Week donations like yours that Florence and her community have built this water dam, with the help of our partner 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 honey bees. She sells the rich, golden honey for cash at the market. Now, Florence is reaping a good life for herself and her family. This is all thanks to generous people like you, who have helped provide a dam close to her home. 'I have been sustained by the earth dam. My life has changed. I am very happy. You can see in my face: my face is shining. I have strength and power.' You can see Florence's strength and power as she hauls heavy buckets to water her crops. You can see her strength and power as she digs up the fresh vegetables she has grown. You can see her strength and power as she takes climate justice into her hands.

Florence is generous, and she knows other people are struggling to cope with the drought. 'There is a village nearby – they don't have an earth dam. They travel for a long way to come to this water point. They are suffering.' 'I am thankful to people who have donated to build this earth dam. I am praying God will increase their giving.' Give today and help more people like Florence stop this climate crisis. Sadly, millions of people in Kenya are desperately struggling to survive the drought. It's so severe that it was declared a national emergency. You can help another community build a dam. Many more people will have the water they need to sustain their families. Please give generously, and help more people like Florence to thrive.

1 For the world and all its people,
we address our prayers to God.

*Confidently, all can worship
in the presence of the Lord.*

2 All the powerless, all the hungry
are most precious to their God.

3 For the poor, God has a purpose,
for the desperate, a word.

4 Christ is here, and Christ is stronger
than the strength of sin or sword.

5 God will fill the earth with justice
when our will and his accord.

Spanish, from *Misa Popular Nicaraguense*, engl. Version John Bell

Sermon:

Mi.6,1-8

'Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

'Hear, you mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

'My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.'

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, 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.

Dear friends

The prophetic voice and office has never been silent, nor has it been unnecessary or dispensable. It cannot be said, however, that it has always enjoyed equal access or was taken notice of and consulted. But today there seems more of a readiness again to receive those who speak prophetically. The reason for this being that we have become aware of issues which are perceived to threaten life on a large scale and in big ways, and which invite predictions of what kind of future mankind is heading towards depending on whether or not we understand the signs and do what is right. [Christian Aid works on the premise of climate change as an indicator of injustice.] There is a climate – no pun intended – of uncertainty and foreboding which has called forth many a “prophet” and made many receptive to their assessments, predictions and future scenarios, and remedies.

It ought to be obvious – and this is a lesson the Bible teaches emphatically – that where there is need for the prophetic there is also much scope for the kind of prophetic utterance that is falsely called that. We need to discern between the true and the false.

But the true prophetic voice is the biblical one, because it is God-sent, God-enabled and God-intending. There was a divine certification that authorised the true prophets and their message and it was the fact that their predictions of highly specified events came true. As they said so it came about. This is not of historical interest only, it authorised their message for those that came after. It is such a prophetic message, therefore, that we have here before us and which Christian Aid has rightly chosen for this day and the period of Christian Aid Week as we consider the fact that things are wrong and how justice may come to prevail.

What makes a prophetic message truly prophetic is its dependence and focus on God’s Word and God’s will. This is of first-rate importance. Because if we evade this, what are we left with? We are left in the hands of those whose assessments and judgments are superficial, whose predictions are crude guesswork and whose remedies fail to penetrate to the level required for true healing. There is a “prophetic” wisdom, and a reception to match, which relies much more on algorithms and mathematical modelling, for instance, than it does on God’s Word and God’s will; a prophetic wisdom which seeks to instrumentalise God for its own agenda and perceived solutions, and often for the same reason instrumentalises also the victims of injustice and those in need of help.

It is no small part of the prophet’s task, of the prophetic word, to tear through the kind of wisdom which acknowledges God only to use him for its own agenda and to use his Word for the same end, the kind of wisdom that says, ‘We know what is good, let us show you.’ [How often does this kind of wisdom appear in and inform our prayers, when we tell God what is good and then ask him to help accordingly!] But do we know what is good and makes for justice – such that we do it! – apart from realising *that we have been shown*? Apart, therefore, from realising that when we assess and judge the things that are wrong and not good, we only look at symptoms without seeing the underlying sickness that needs addressed – our departure from *the good that we have been shown*? Jeremiah, another prophet, points at this issue when he says to Israel: “*Consider then and realise how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God.*” (2,19)

The prophetic word in the mouth of Micah in a way takes us back to the moment where “it went wrong”, where the departure occurred that has led and does lead to so much that is wrong, to the darkness of injustice and hardness of heart: “*He has shown you, O mortal, 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.*”

In the word, the direct address to us, translated here as 'O mortal' and meaning 'man/mankind', lies the serious and profound reminder that helps us see what is at the heart of the departure: That we are not God and therefore not our own makers nor our own or each other's saviour, that we are not the masters of history nor of our own fate, that God alone is good and He alone is Lord and we answerable to Him; that we are created to be good by receiving His Word and doing His will.

Dear friends, the good that we have been shown and that God our Maker requires of us, means that we recognise much that is unjust, many of the wrongs and ills that mar the beauty that could be; our conscience bears the mark of it and we are spurred on by this to do deeds of kindness and generosity; it is also the reason why our hearts are warmed by examples of 'chesed' (Hebrew) – mercy and selfless loving-kindness – and examples of humility and modesty. And yet we need to be reminded of it, because man in his pride has departed from it by assigning to himself the power and right to determine what is and what is not good and to be himself the way of salvation. We need to be reminded by it that this departure is what has brought down justice and righteousness which were meant to be the crowning glory of mankind made in God's image.

If we would let the prophetic word reach us and open our heart to its message, we must not do the superficial and foolish thing of disregarding the sinfulness of man - the departure from God -, man's determination to put his own will before that of God. 'Superficial' – because this would be like thinking we could have the moment back that the departure happened. (In everyday life we know well the wishful nature of the thought: "If only I could have that moment back...!") But we must hear it in the light of the truth that God's Word became flesh and showed us God's goodness in a new way – in a way that brings the sinner back to what he has departed from – that is, in the light that is Jesus Christ "*who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*" (Tit.2,14) AMEN

A prayer by Christian Aid's Global Theology Advisor, Bob Kikuyu.

Great God,
Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the heavens
Hear the cry of the people
Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair
Hear the cry of the people
Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and homes submerged
Hear the cry of the people,
When creation is hitting back, with rage and resistance
Give us hope, grant us salvation,
Give us a new relationship with creation
With reverence to tend this gift from You
And say once again of the earth and all you created
It is GOOD.

- time of prayer / intercession – [we pray for God’s blessing on the efforts this week of the volunteers of Christian Aid and give thanks for them, for a plentiful response and the joining in prayer for the cause of God’s kingdom in justice and the will for peace;

we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God’s Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here; we think of the situation in India, the suffering of the people there and elsewhere, and give thanks for the help that is being delivered; for unity in the determination to share our means with those who lack them; we pray for God’s blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Keep hold of what is good and avoid all forms of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through, and keep you sound in spirit, soul, and body, free of any fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN