

16th May 2021

Easter 7 - Christian Aid Sunday

Introduction

This is the seventh Sunday of Easter, last before Pentecost and the ending of Christian Aid Week. The lectionary readings touch on the theme of water, too much or too little, which has run through the Christian Aid Week focus on climate change in Kenya. The readings highlight the themes of love and joy that are central to the experience of the Christian faith. Love for our neighbours near and far inspires us to strive for an abundant life for all and brings us together to raise our voices in praise to God and to share our resources with others.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, we are people of the world you love and care for. We praise you, Gracious God, for calling us into relationship with you. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving your life for the world. We thank you Holy Spirit, for your guidance and gifts that enable us to draw others to you. For you are faithful in times of uncertainty, strong when we are weak, and in you we have our life and being.

Forgive us when we have turned away from your Word and immersed ourselves in the distractions of the world. Forgive us when we have distanced ourselves from those you have called us to service. We thank you that you are always with us surrounding us with your grace and mercy.

We pray in the name of Jesus, and say together the prayer he taught his followers: 'Our Father ...

Bible Reading Psalm 98

Sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done wonderful deeds. He has won a mighty victory and has revealed his righteousness to every nation! He has remembered his promise to love and be faithful to Israel. The whole earth has seen the salvation of our God.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy! Sing your praise to the Lord with the harp and melodious song, with trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn. Make a joyful symphony before the Lord, the King!

Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the earth and all living things join in. Let the rivers clap their hands in glee! Let the hills sing out their songs of joy before the Lord. For the Lord is coming to bring justice for the earth. He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness.

Reflection

This is a Psalm of celebration and thanksgiving for the people of Israel to sing at the end of a significant time of trial, perhaps the exodus or the exile. It begins with a call to sing a new song and gives reason for a different song of praise. A

victory has been won, a time of hardship overcome because of the Lord's strength, love and faithfulness.

We are coming to the end of a very long year in which there were two main lockdowns due to the Corona Virus. We have much to reflect on as our longest standing member Faith Richardson died of Covid and some people in our congregation and their family members have suffered and are still suffering with the effects of this virus. Yet we also have much to give thanks to God: The Lord has remained with us and sustained us throughout this whole period. We have continued to keep in touch with each other through the mini magazine put together by Chris Curtis and by telephone and door visits. Our members and friends have been able to continue to worship as even though not able to gather in person - through the internet by uploading recorded worship on the website and by written Prayers and Reflections. We give thanks to God that vaccinations made by scientists have enabled us to begin to meet up with others once again. We are now able to reopen our church building, showing our support of fair trade through our Just Sharing shop and will soon open to provide hospitality through Tookey's coffee bar. Elders are exploring how we are to be church post Covid – having learned new skills and re-evaluating our priorities for the future.

Then the Psalm extends praise to all the earth. Nature is also to praise of the victory of the Lord and God's anticipated coming. We are invited to hope and work with creation for that day when the rightness of God will reign in a world of climate change. The judgement of God in the context of global warming may make us reflect on our part in contributing to ecological destruction and an erratic climate. But creation's praise and rejoicing in anticipation of the justice of God is a reminder that the Lord is coming again to bring justice and wholeness. We can be freed from our guilt and have the Holy Spirit enable us to bring about changes in our behaviour needed for all of creation to fully flourish. Then together with all creation, we shall glorify God with a new song!

Bible Reading Acts 10.44-48

Even as Peter was saying these things the Holy Spirit fell upon all who had heard the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles too. And there could be no doubt about it, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter asked, 'Can anyone object to them being baptized now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?' So, he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterwards Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Reflection

In this passage Peter is in the midst of telling Gentile people about God's love found in Christ and the Gentiles are visibly moved by God's Spirit. Peter then asks the question: 'Can anyone withhold from them the water of baptism?'

His question shows that God's grace is greater than any racial or cultural divisions. This is a moment of radical inclusion and acceptance of Gentiles into

the family of God by the early church; it is a powerful moment of overcoming longstanding barriers between Gentiles and Jews. It is noteworthy that Peter 'orders' the baptism – some of the Jewish believers were still in some need of persuasion to do such a radical inclusive act. We are reminded that God loves all people, of different races, social classes, genders, ages and abilities. How are we to show welcome and inclusion of all people in our church life as we gather in person once again?

Peter's question, 'How then can anyone withhold the water?' could be considered in different ways. The use of water in the sacrament of baptism emphasises just how important our physical life is, how important and sacred it is to pour water on what sustains and strengthens life. We could say that if we would not withhold water for baptism from anyone who wishes it, then should we also not withhold water needed for thirsty animals, crops and people across the world? Christian Aid is helping create solutions to water shortages by and with communities in Kenya. Learn more about this on their website:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>

Do support Christian Aid as you are able.

Christian Aid Week Prayer

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.

(Rev. Bob Kikuyu, Christian Aid Global Theology Advisor, Nairobi, Kenya)

Prayer of Blessing

May God lead us by your Holy Spirit: to a broader vision of your work. In our weakness make us strong; Show us when and how to act for you. In Jesus' name, AMEN.