

How appropriate it is that Christian Aid week falls – as it often does – within Eastertide. Eastertide, when we proclaim that life triumphs over death, justice will overcome injustice and love will transform indifference.

This year our Christian Aid week concludes on this Rogation Sunday when we further proclaim that abundance, God’s abundant creation will overwhelm scarcity.

Rogation Sunday and the rogation days, these days of prayer as we prepare to celebrate Ascension Day on Thursday, proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of all the world, the King of Creation, whose Kingdom is for Heaven and earth.

The message of Christian Aid Week, that “we believe in life before death”, that we wish to affirm creation, and abundance, and reject all that prevents abundant living, chimes well with the message of Eastertide and the triumph of Christ the King whose Kingdom is for both this world and the next.

The passages of Scripture set for us this evening reinforce this idea of justice, abundance, and the triumph of good.

The Prophet Zechariah writing to the exiles of Jerusalem, promising the rebuilding of their city and temple, longs for the day of Lord when justice and mercy and compassion are the hall mark of God's People. His vision is of a transformed and renewed world spills out in these words:

Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

It is a wonderful word picture, a vision of how the world might be, painting our deepest hopes and longings for a fair, just and peaceful world.

And then the author of the book of Revelation also writes of how the world might be when he shares his vision of the perfect city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Here there will be no more pain, no more crying, no more death and mourning.

There will be light and open gates and the wealth and splendour of the nations will be brought to it ... for riches are no bad thing if they are used according to God's economy and earned by just and fair means. Oddly there is no Temple in this city (unlike in Zechariah's vision of a rebuilt city) – there is no need for a temple, for God will be in the midst of the city and the people.

This perfect and perfected city, Erna Stevenson<sup>1</sup> points out, is a mirror image or inversion of the world as we know it and the world in which Christian Aid works.

Here so many people without water: there ample clean and living water;

Here people shelter in windowless shacks: there they bask in God's glorious light;

Here there is sickness and disease: there health and wholeness, for the leaves of the tree are for healing.

This hopeful vision, this glorious city is not just pie in the sky but what we hope for when we pray, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Christian Aid over the past 60 years has world tirelessly to make that vision a reality, to make that dream come true.

This week we have been encouraged to think about stories of refugees, people forced from their homes, fleeing violence, oppressive regimes; leaving behind home, family, livelihood; seeking sanctuary, open gates, peace and prosperity.

In a world of closed doors and borders, in a world of fear and prejudice, in a world of false economies and false idols the work and message of Christian Aid often falls on deaf and deafened ears.

But, working with refugees since the Second World War, Christian Aid is not about to give up now. And the story of Theodore, found on their website tells of one refugee finding love, welcome, hope and peace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HmU-OIL5h4>

Christian Aid Week is one of those weeks in the year when Christians come together and are not embarrassed of proclaiming the Gospel which has been entrusted to us: we will get out of our

sanctuaries, put up posters and banners, advertise on busses and bus stops, even in some places still go door to door, yes asking for money but also telling and witnessing to the Good News of God's Kingdom and the vision God for a renewed and transformed world.

And what of us, where do we fit in?? We can pray, we can give and we can campaign.

Pray: we have had plenty of opportunity this week to do just that and we can do more praying in a few minutes; praying for Christian Aid's work in all its aspects is something we can do week in and week out if we want to be part of a changing world.

Give: some of you not doubt will give to Christian Aid as a regular giver, as part of your committed giving; some of us may or we may not have been asked for money this week; it is not too late to send a cheque, a text or log onto their website in order to put our money where our mouth is.

Campaign: one of the great things that Christian Aid does is campaign for justice and to call its supporters to petition for and support its campaigns. Currently Christian Aid is campaigning for a

fair international taxation system, preventing corporate bodies from tax dodging which keeps people trapped in poverty. Christian Aid is also encouraging us to actively get involved in changing the story of negativity around refugees to a more positive message that upholds those escaping injustice and war, and that celebrates those who offer a welcome...some of you may well have picked up the leaflet at the back of church and used it this past week, with its campaign postcard to the incoming Prime Minister.

The message of Christian Aid Week, that “we believe in life before death”, that we wish to affirm creation, and abundance, and reject all that prevents abundant living chimes well with the message of Eastertide and the triumph of Christ the King whose Kingdom is for both this world and the next. So let us pray:

### A prayer

You are the God in whom we take refuge;  
yet many have been cast off,  
cast into the depths of the sea.

You are the God in whom we take refuge;  
yet many have had to walk so far,  
mourning for family and longing for home.

You are the God in whom we take refuge;  
yet many are oppressed by conflict,  
refused safe passage and the refuge they need.

You are the God in whom we take refuge:  
so to you we bring our downcast souls,  
disquieted by questions, we refuse to be silent.  
Be our hope and our help as we call  
for welcome and hospitality for all.  
You are the God in whom we take refuge.  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Erna Stevenson, “The resurrection makes a new vision possible, and compels us to act”