



THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY
EASTER 6
9 May 2021

Christian Aid
Acts 10:44-end, John 15:9-17

Monday sees the start of Christian Aid Week 2021, with this year's theme being the *Double Threat of Climate Chaos and Covid*. As ever, Christian Aid tells some individual stories as examples of both the problem, and of what can be done. In this case they have looked to the East African country of Kenya, a place which is already being seriously affected by the effects of climate change, where once reliable and predictable rainfall has given way to prolonged periods of drought, broken with short intervals of intense rainfall, leading to flooding. This has caused widespread failure of crops, and brought hunger to communities that used to be well-fed. They tell the story of Rose, a grandmother looking after her grandchildren alone. She is one person who, in later life has come to know regular hunger that was never a problem in her younger days, and now she has the responsibility of caring for her grandchildren as well. In the periods of drought she is faced every morning with a long walk to obtain water for her family for the day, which is no fun on an empty stomach. Rose's story today is like Florence's a few years ago, when she was widowed and her crops failed, due to lack of water, leaving her with no way to provide properly for her children. But in Florence's case, her local community was supported by a Christian Aid sponsored partner to build a dam, which provides water for the community and has enabled the crops to grow again. This ensures enough food for Florence and her family, and even for Florence to take up bee-keeping, the honey making a cash crop for Florence to improve still further the chances for her family. (*You can find a picture of Florence at the end of these notes.*)

We have heard stories like Rose's and Florence's often enough before, but we need to take notice of them.

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Jewish believers are 'astonished' that the Holy Spirit had been poured out 'even on the Gentiles'. Although there is a lot in the Hebrew scriptures about the Jews being God's chosen people there is also plenty to suggest that God's care is not just for them but 'for all nations', but they found it difficult to accept that it might be true, even when they had the evidence of the gentiles 'speaking in tongues and extolling God'. S. Peter himself had struggled with this, but had been convinced that the good news of the gospel was for everyone and so challenges the others 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people?'

S. Peter and his fellow Jewish believers are not alone in struggling with this question of God's inclusivity. We all of us understand our own concerns, and the concerns of people like us, but it is not so easy to identify with others from different places or different cultures. It makes me uncomfortable to see the pictures of Covid-overwhelmed hospitals in India – they look so similar to the pictures from British hospitals earlier this year, just as those looked so like the images from Spanish, Italian or Chinese hospitals early last year. When we go on to realise that those who made it to the inadequately-equipped Indian hospitals are the lucky ones. For every one of them there are many who have no realistic hope of ever reaching a hospital – yet those too are our sisters and brothers, for whom God cares.

In the Gospel reading we have the familiar commandment of Jesus to love one another because in doing so our joy will be completed. Whilst any one of God's children is suffering or in anguish the joy of the rest of us is incomplete. As we have heard so often, both of the plague and of climate change, "We're all in this together" and, "No-one is safe until everyone is safe".

Most of the time we feel powerless to make a difference – we might do our bit by following the Covid-19 rules, or we might try to reduce our personal carbon footprint by walking more and driving less, but Christian Aid Week gives us an opportunity to do more, by raising funds to support projects that will give people a sustainable future, full of hope and joy. Giving people, whom we shall never meet, like Rose and her grandchildren the prospects already enjoyed by Florence and her children – in doing so we shall be obeying Jesus’ command.

Clive Lemmon



Florence at home in Kenya