

John 17:6-19, Christian Aid Sunday

Holy Communion, Easter 7, 12th May 2024

This is Christian Aid Week. I noticed this year that Christian Aid Week is the same age as I am; it started in 1957. It has been going a while.

Christian Aid Sunday may excite some of you, bore others of you; lead you to rejoice in what Christian organisations are doing to help those in need, or worry you that you are going to feel pressured to give. Seeing need can generate compassion in us, or overwhelm us.

Christian Aid is one of the main charities this church supports. This is a pie chart from our church annual report, and we gave more to Christian Aid than any other charity.

We are going to look at some of the materials that Christian Aid have provided, including a short video. I know some of you who saw it after the service last weekend, but I want to include those who did not. And you might get a bit more from watching it again.

I am impressed by the Christian Aid materials this year. Their theme is Extraordinary Love. It is not highlighting need. It is about empowering people, helping them to help themselves, giving them hope.

It is about a woman called Aline Nibogora, from a village in Makamba province in Burundi, in East Africa. She had been through hard times following domestic abuse, had lost her three children.

She told Christian Aid that "They forgot I was a human being." But she retained her faith, and was helped by a Christian Aid project to start to rebuild her life. Not so much by being given stuff, but by being shown how to get people together in the community to help each other.

Watch video: <https://christianaid.resourcespace.com/pages/view.php?ref=10741&k=4e1e8ad587>.

Our lectionary reading was John 17: Jesus praying for his disciples just before he was arrested on Good Friday. He commits them to the Father's care, asking for the Father to protect them in His name, so that they may be one, even as we are one (11). A few verses later, Jesus makes it clear that he is praying not just for the disciples in front of him but for us too: 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one' (20). It is quite an extraordinary request. That they, and we, can share in the extraordinary love of God. There is love between the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we are to be united as three persons of God are united: 'that they may be one, even as we are one'. Where we see divisions and differences, Jesus prayer is for connections.

Jesus was praying ahead of his own death, saying to the Father 'and now I am no longer in the world... and I am coming to you' (v11). But Jesus love was such that he gave his life for his disciples, and for us.

From this comes Christians' compassion for others. Here is the motivation behind our faith, that gets us to look outward in response to Jesus' giving of himself to us and for us.

I was listening to an interview this week with Nancy Pelosi, who was the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Congress, in the United States. She has been an immensely powerful, influential person in American politics, leading the Democrats for 20 years, till just recently. She is 83, and still going strong. She comes from an Italian, Catholic family, and in the interview she said 'We saw public service as an extension, frankly, of our religion; to meet the needs of people... Understanding the gospel of Matthew: I was hungry, you fed me.'

Your response might be to give to Christian Aid. Or take a more active part in what they are doing. But our general response should be one of compassion, whether for those in situations so different from the way we live, like Aline, or for those we know, or for people we bump into. And doing so in a way that helps them to maintain self respect, and feel valued. That would be an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Jeremy Thake, St. John & St. Stephen.

John 17

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.