

# Sermon pack

## for Christian Aid Week 2022

Thank you for downloading this sermon pack for use during Christian Aid Week and throughout the year. We hope it inspires and helps you undertake the urgent task of preaching about climate justice.

This pack includes the stories for Christian Aid Week and four sets of sermon notes, listed below.

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## Jessica's story

Are you hungry? What's for dinner tonight? Maybe you're looking forward to fish and chips, pasta, or your favourite family meal around the table.

Jessica Mwedzi, a loving mum in Zimbabwe, fears her family won't eat tonight. When food is scarce, she can only give her children one bowl of porridge a day.

She shares her heartbreak: 'My children crave a decent meal, but I can't provide. It pains me to send them to bed hungry.'

For Jessica, drought means every day is a struggle for survival. Like many women in Zimbabwe, she toils on her farm, but no food can grow on her ashen dry land.

'One year, we had no rain. The scorching sun burnt my crops just as they were about to bloom. It was so painful and disheartening.'

It's unjust that drought robs Jessica of the power to provide for her family. Her husband is unwell, so she is the only breadwinner. She says: 'Women are at the mercy of climate change and hunger.'

Once before, when things were desperate, Jessica asked her neighbours for food. But she came home with nothing.

Jessica is hungry. Hungry for a good meal. Hungry to earn a decent living. Hungry to provide a more hopeful future for her family.

You can help this loving mum turn hunger into hope.

Your gift this Christian Aid Week could help Jessica grow seeds that thrive in the drought.

In the months to come, she'll turn these seeds into fresh food like tomatoes, beans and cucumbers to sell and feed her family. She'll have the joy of seeing her children grow up happy and healthy.

Jessica's love for her family gives her courage to stand strong against the threat of drought. 'My children give me the power to go ahead,' she says. 'I pray they have a better future.'

This Christian Aid Week, as you sit down to eat your favourite family meal around the table, please pray for Jessica and her family. Your gifts and prayers could fill families like hers with hope.



Janet is proud to grow golden maize to provide for her family.

## Janet's story

What makes you smile? For Janet Zirugo, 70, it's seeing her grandchildren's faces light up as she hugs them tight.

Janet has a big heart. Many of the children in her family are orphans, and she is their sole provider.

'In my family, children look up to me and I must give them food. I am more than glad to share what I have,' she says.

In her village in Zimbabwe, Janet has seen how drought pushed her family into desperate hunger.

'One year, there was so little food. Rains had not fallen. We ate things which we wouldn't eat in normal times. **My heart was so painful thinking that my family would die. By God's grace we did not die. We soldiered on.**

With faith, hope and love, Janet brought her family through this painful time.

Thanks to kind people like you, she was given drought-resistant seeds that can grow in this harsh climate. You'll be happy to know her farm is now bursting with life. She proudly shows us the food she has grown – bowls full of groundnuts, wild fruit, golden corn; a rainbow of colour.

Now, she is strong and resilient. With all her strength, she works on her farm so her family never again go hungry. She has built a storeroom to keep her harvest safe and secure, to help her bounce back in future droughts. She knows when changes are coming and can adapt before crisis hits.

'My life is changing,' she says. 'This project is lifting us up. We are thankful. It makes me happy to see my family are strong and well fed.'

As she reflects on how her life has changed, Janet sings with joy. We rejoice with her.

# 2

## Christian Aid Week Sunday, 15 May

Points that connect the Revised Common Lectionary passages for the first Sunday of Christian Aid Week

### Passages:

- **Psalm 148**
- **Revelation 21:1-6**
- **John 13:31-35**

### Psalm 148 All creation's praise

- Take time to linger over the detail of this psalm. It is an all-inclusive call for praise of the Lord. From the heights of the heavens (v1-6) to the deepest depths of the earth (v7-12).
- Humanity, old and young, and of all genders, are called along with stars, sea monsters, stormy wind, cattle, birds and creepy crawlies to join in this chorus of praise.
- In the context of a world of climate injustice, this psalm makes clear we are all creatures. Humanity is part of creation. (This theme is unpacked in our global theology of climate change paper: [Song of the Prophets.](#))
- The raising up of a horn for his people (v14) is one of the catalysts for such praise. The horn of an ox or a ram is a symbol of power throughout the Old Testament (Working Preacher).
- Those who hold power and influence are a key element of how we tackle this climate crisis. In our worship and praise as followers of Jesus, we look to God as the source of power, who models the kind of power that serves the weakest.
- This Christian Aid Week, we are invited to praise with Janet Zirugo, 70, who lives in Zimbabwe. She praises God with gladness as her family are no longer hungry: 'My life is changing. We are thankful.'



Janet worships with her community during the Sunday service. She prays: 'God give me strength to fend for my family.'

## Revelation 21:1-6

- John writes of his vision in the book of Revelation. It is a revelation that brings not only hope for the future, but also a vision of how God wants the world to be. John writes the book of Revelation at a time when the Roman Empire is advancing. The Empire seeks more and more political and economic power. And to get it, the Romans demand that their own emperors and traditional gods are worshipped. But John is providing another way, the way of worshipping God. The scenes he describes provide encouragement to the early churches to directly challenge the powers that would suppress the Kingdom of God.

### The new creation

- John's vision challenges us today to not settle into this contemporary global empire but to seek to understand a 'new heaven and new earth.' An understanding also inspired by the glorious new creation described in Isaiah 65:17-25.
- God comes to dwell with mortals in a new earth, to live in the home that earth was intended to be. The earth as God's home gives us much inspiration to participate in that work of

re-creation now. A work that challenges the loss and damage caused by climate injustice.

- The idea of the earth as God's home is described beautifully by Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun: 'Human beings and the world come to fulfilment when they become in actuality what they have always been in intention: when God rules the world in such a way that God and the world are "at home" with each other – more precisely, when God comes to dwell in the world and when the world has become and experiences itself as being God's home.' (For the Life of the World, 2019.)

### Every tear wiped away

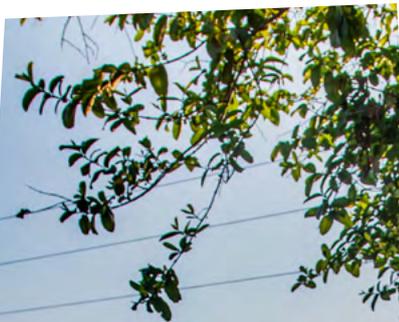
- In both his vision in the throne room of Revelation 7:16-17 and in seeing the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:3-4, John draws our attention to God wiping away every tear from the eyes of those who have suffered.
- The anticipation of such comfort and tender compassion serves as a catalyst to us today to ensure the tears of frustration and desperation of those hungry to provide can be wiped away. To stand with people like Jessica who are living at the sharp end of the climate crisis.

Jessica Mwedzi  
at home with  
her much-loved  
children in  
Zimbabwe.



- Drought is making Jessica's community hungry and impoverished, denying them the fullness of life and dignity God intended. We have an opportunity to participate in creating a glimpse of the earth as God's home when we work together to help women like Jessica to grow fresh food to feed their families and to work to recover the loss and damage caused by climate injustice.
- In this season of Easter, verse 4 gives us much comfort and hope that the life-denying effects of the climate crisis, and the death and heartache of the global pandemic, will be no more. This and every Christian Aid Week, we work towards the day when all such injustices, death and suffering have ended.
- And in stories about drought and hunger from Zimbabwe, may the anticipation and invitation of verse 6: 'To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life,' come as refreshment to all our world-weary souls.

Janet waters her garden in Zimbabwe, thanks to support from Christian Aid.



## John 13:31-35 The new commandment

- Jesus' giving of the commandment to love one another was new to the disciples. They were used to being asked to devote themselves to God but this commandment – love one another – was new in its scope and inspiration, spurred by the love that Jesus had for them.
- 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' Jesus entreats us to demonstrate our love for him by loving one another. It is out of the fullness of the love poured into us by God that we in turn pour out love to our sisters and brothers.
- Love acts, as demonstrated so powerfully by Jesus enduring the cross and overcoming death. Each action we take this Christian Aid Week demonstrates our love in action:
  - **give to help women grow crops that survive in the drought**
  - **raise your voice for justice by joining our Loss and Damage campaign**
  - **pray that families will stay strong and be provided for during times of drought.**

# 3

## Sunday after Christian Aid Week, 22 May

Points that connect the Revised Common Lectionary passages for the Sunday at the end of Christian Aid Week

### Passages:

- **Acts 16:9-15**
- **Psalm 67**
- **Revelation 21:10-27, 22:1-5**
- **John 14:23-29**

### Acts 16 Come and help

- **Acts 16:9** – ‘Come to Macedonia and help us.’ When we spend time engaging with the lived experience of communities in Zimbabwe and choose to give, act and pray this Christian Aid Week, we respond to a similar invitation. Not by going in person, as Paul did to Macedonia, but in our partnership of grassroots communities working on the ground to make a difference.
- **Acts 16:13** – this verse provides an opportunity to sing that beautiful spiritual, *Down to the River to Pray* as part of the service this Sunday. It is also an invitation for us to spend time listening to the women in Zimbabwe, as we share the stories of Jessica and Janet provided above.
- **Acts 16:15** – Lydia’s first act of faithfulness in response to hearing the gospel is to provide hospitality. She is moved to provide for the travellers. How might our faith move us to open heartedness and provision this Christian Aid Week?

### Psalm 67

- This psalm is our heart’s cry for this and every Christian Aid Week. That all who organise and coordinate the many fundraising efforts this week would know the gracious blessing of God. That they would know God’s face shining upon them (v1).
- We long for the day when God’s wisdom and ways will guide the nations upon the earth, and when God’s justice will reign (v4). It is with this hope that we join with the work of God this Christian Aid Week.

- There is more than enough for everyone: ‘the earth has yielded its increase’ (v6). It is the devastation of drought caused by human-induced climate injustice that is denying this abundance to communities like Jessica’s in Zimbabwe. A cause for much lament, generosity and action!

### Revelation 21:10-27, 22:1-5

- When we are running short of hope or confidence, especially in the unrelenting fight for climate justice and other world issues, we know that we gain our strength and vision from the Spirit of God. We are invited to lift our gaze to see the world God intended, and be strengthened in helping to bring it to pass.
- The river of the water of life (22:1) is a particularly poignant and evocative image as we reflect on the devastation of drought in Zimbabwe this Christian Aid Week. As we anticipate the refreshing and life-giving flow, may the crystal waters spur us to action, to work for the day when no one hungers or thirsts anymore.
- The leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations in verse 22 provide us with powerful imagery of the healing of the earth’s environment. Within the stories being told from Zimbabwe we find a wonderful story of a Resurrection Bush, a native plant being used to help communities adapt to the drought and effects of the climate crisis. Even in the most literal of ways, the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations.
- The tree of life and abundant fruitfulness of verse 22:2 provides a perpetual harvest that sustains and nurtures all those hungry to provide, those who are weary of a world where extreme hunger is still a scandal and a scourge.
- Verse 22:4 reminds us that all human beings are made in the image of God and all of creation carries God’s signature. God’s name is written on our foreheads. We all belong to God and to each other, a family in partnership, all standing in the light of the glory of God.

# 4

## Sermon notes to accompany the order of service for Christian Aid Week

Download our accompanying order of service at [caweek.ie/resources](http://caweek.ie/resources)

### Matthew 3:1-10

(This passage was chosen by the Christian Aid worship collective because of the rich and mixed metaphors in reflecting on the hunger crisis caused by climate chaos. It serves as an encouragement for us to raise our own prophetic voices for climate justice.)

### Context

- Moving from the tree in the garden of Genesis to the tree of the city in Revelation, the Bible bookends our relationship with creation. A relationship that has become broken. A brokenness that we see in the hunger still experienced by people and animals across the world as droughts pervade and persist in communities such as those in Zimbabwe.
- In the middle of this narrative, we come to the tree of the Cross. God entering into the

suffering of humanity, not remaining at a distance but choosing to enter into the life of the world, expressing God's own hunger to provide. The work of the cross reconciling and initiating the work of recreation and restoration of the earth as God's home.

### A poised axe

- In Matthew's account of John the Baptist in this passage, we see another tree, a tree with an axe lying at the root. The axe has not yet been lifted to begin the work of cutting down.
- It is worth drawing attention to John's particularly deep connection with creation. His wilderness lifestyle, his camel's hair, leather, locusts and honey. He models the communion with creation that Dr Rowan Williams speaks of, as he encourages us to regain a sense that our relationship to the earth is about 'communion not consumption'.



Janet walks her great grandchildren to school in Njani village, Zimbabwe.

- It is hard not to picture John the Baptist as some sort of Fred Flintstone character brandishing an axe in this account. But as the theologian Paula Gooder points out, he is a poignant character who 'stands permanently on the outside.'
- The axe John wields conveys the urgent awakening that is needed for a change of lifestyle. And as such, it serves as a powerful symbol for the times we are living through and the climate crisis.
- The axe could have at least three symbolic meanings:
  - Speaking to what has been cut down that has led to the droughts and hunger in Zimbabwe. The axe that has felled the trees and has led to desertification and extreme changes in climate needs to be laid down.
  - Speaking to what needs to be cut down in terms of systemic structures that cause the suffering and anguish of hunger in the world. The axe is used to break the chains of injustice.
  - Speaking specifically to John the Baptist's challenge in the reading – the need to take an inventory of our own society, what needs to be cut down from our expectations of how everyone should live? An axe is needed to allow for a return to nature, for the process of rewilding to take hold. It is needed to chop away everything that stops us from having fullness of life.
- This cutting down is not a felling of more much-needed trees and foliage, but rather it is removing of all the things that have got in the way of how we need to live as co-creators with God.
- It is to prune and cut back what gets in the way of our connection with God, each other and creation, for the flourishing of all and the glory of God. Rather than seeing our calling to care for creation as a deprivation and a denial, we rather see it as the axe breaking the chains that bind us to a diminished way of life. We see the axe as breaking the chains of injustice. Metaphorically, John puts the axe in our hands, it's lying there at the foot of the tree. What will we do with it? Ignore it or use it?
- Finally, we reflect on the fruit as a source of hope. The axe is not required if the tree is bearing fruit. The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control of the fruit of the Spirit. It is not fear but faith that inspires our choices to create a fairer world and protect creation. We end with the vision of a fruitful future of abundant energy, a stable economy, of resources available to all, where everyone's lives are not worse but better than they are today.



**Janet shows us the abundant grains she has grown on her farm.**

# 5

## Sermon notes on the theme of hunger

### Hunger for food, hunger for hope and hunger for justice

#### Adversary

- There is a perspective to be had in our subject focus for Christian Aid Week 2022 that reveals a profound shift in the balance of power from that which has historically been held. A shift where we have seen the sun and the rain move from being primarily essential allies to seemingly existential adversaries.
- In Zimbabwe, the dry seasons are becoming increasingly problematic to predict and increasingly difficult to define. Vulnerable communities face the threat of more intense droughts, floods, and storms.

#### Crops

- When the rain does come, its intensity increases year on year. A factor uncomfortably balanced by the way in which the daily minimum temperatures continue to climb.
- This change in the climate has resulted in more challenging conditions for farmers and makes the successful production of crops next to impossible.
- It is not solely the scarcity of food that brings concerns. The tyranny of this ever-changing weather is accompanied by the presence of diseases such as malaria, cholera and dengue fever. As if things weren't tough enough as they are.

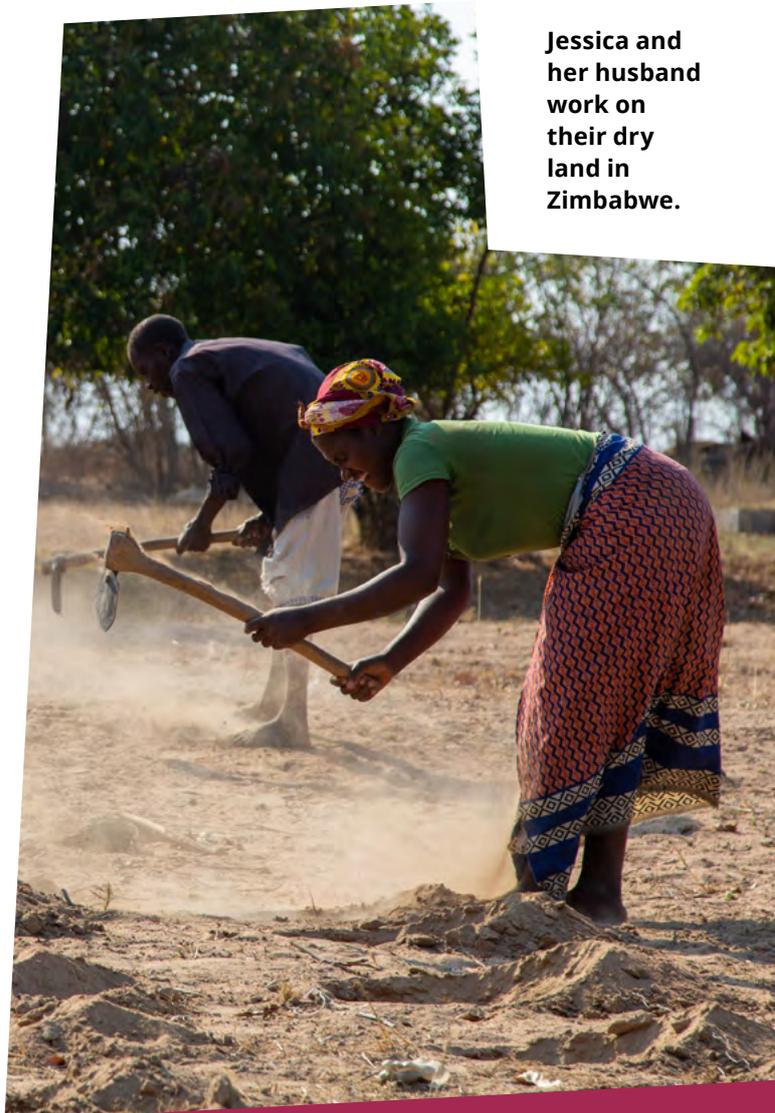
#### Hunger

- This year, we stand alongside Jessica Mwedzi and her young family. Jessica relies on the rain to farm and provide for her family. The failure of her crops is devastating – it pushes her into a struggle for survival.
- It is perhaps unsurprising that this situation provokes strong primal fears within us – and so it should. The word 'hunger' needs little explanation and can be accompanied by feelings as much as facts. Jessica's harvest fails and therefore she immediately faces the threat of hunger.

- Paradoxically, however, hunger is, from certain angles, a simple problem to solve. Put simply, it is satiated by the successful production of agriculture, crops and food, or as it is so often referred to in Scripture, 'bread'.

#### Symbol

- Of course, the use of the word 'bread' in the Bible has multiple uses and multiple meanings. Indeed, the word is used so freely and frequently that it could potentially provoke that blindness to meaning that can often walk side by side with endless repetition.
- Bringing the word into view, perhaps pre-eminently, we are told that Jesus is the 'bread of life' (John 6:35). He is the 'living bread' (John 6:51).



Jessica and her husband work on their dry land in Zimbabwe.

It is Jesus, above all else, that we need to sustain us. It is he who satiates our hunger for life and our desire for a relationship with God.

- Bread holds an essential and central significance in the Eucharist or act of communion (Matthew 26:26). 'Bread', in these situations, acts as a form of connective tissue between God and man.
- In the great encounter between Christ and the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), we observe the challenge to turn stones into bread. Stones as the most elemental of substances and bread as the first port of call for the hungry people. Stones here represent the wilderness, with bread diametrically opposed and being referred to as nothing less than divine provision.

## Bread

- But the word is also used to convey the simple 'bread and butter' of everyday life.
- In the New Testament bread is used to primarily satiate hunger while making a wider point – as we see in Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000. The miracle so powerful that it concludes with an overabundance (Matthew 14:13-21).
- As far as the Bible is concerned, 'bread', it seems, is ubiquitous. It is everywhere.

## The very least

- When Jesus asks: 'Which of you, if your child asks for bread, will give him a stone?' (Matthew 7:9) it is clear he is not suggesting bread is a luxury.
- Bread is the starting point. Bread is the bare minimum. Bread is the thing that is the very least.
- This basicness is reinforced in the tale of The Prodigal Son where we are told that even the father's servants had enough bread to eat. (Luke 15:17) Even the servants – even bread.

- Further, when taught how to pray to God the Father, our very starting point is the request for bread. We are to ask for bread for today. (Matthew 6:11)
- Bread is non-negotiable. If the child asks for bread, they don't get stones, they get bread.

## Justice

- Returning to Jessica and her family, her life is one of hunger. Hunger for food, for bread, and the ability to grow her own food.
- But there is another hunger and that is for justice. That the powers and dominions that cause the injustice so many live with are radically and subversively changed.

## Presence

- This year you can help women like Jessica to provide for their families. You could help her to:
  - **grow drought-tolerant crops**
  - **learn how to grow food in dry seasons**
  - **build storerooms to survive future droughts**
  - **eat more healthy and nutritious food**
  - **learn new skills for alternative sources of income when agriculture fails.**
- Your gift this Christian Aid Week will not only help fulfil the need to grow food but will also act as a physical demonstration of hope and the in-breaking of justice. It is the work of the Kingdom of God and one that we cheerfully and enthusiastically embrace, once again, this Christian Aid Week.

For more worship resources including an order of service, PowerPoint and prayer sheet, visit [caweek.ie/resources](http://caweek.ie/resources)

With thanks to Christian Aid colleagues and members of the worship and theology collective for bringing their theological expertise and preaching experience to the preparation of these sermon notes.