



Esther Saizi prays in the church near her home in Malawi.

## Introduction

This pack contains sermon notes for Christian Aid Week Sunday (14 May) based on the Revised Common Lectionary Ascension readings, as well as readings that fit with the Christian Aid Week story themes. You can use these as a starting point for writing your own sermon.

We would welcome feedback as to what you find the most useful for your context, so that we can tailor our offerings for the future. You can contact us via [dublin@christian-aid.org](mailto:dublin@christian-aid.org) or [belfast@christian-aid.org](mailto:belfast@christian-aid.org)

## Sermon notes

### Joel 1:10-12; 2:21-25

- Joel 1:10-12 is a lament whose words could have been written today. Its words echo across dry, crippled lands where climate chaos has taken everything – food, water, health and hope. In places where people have done



nothing to cause the devastation with which they are burdened, joy withers like the crops they depend on.

- Joel 2:21-22 uses a familiar biblical phrase – ‘do not be afraid’. Used by prophets and angels and Jesus himself; spoken to Abram, to Hagar, and Mary when she was asked to say yes, this phrase does not belittle the fear we feel, but calls us to not let fear win. Do not be afraid – but stand together, walk and work together to bring justice. The status quo counts on our fear-induced apathy. This passage reminds us that God created the world for good and we steward and serve creation and each other.

## Matthew 13:31-35

- The mustard seed is an evocative, surprising image, representing the subversive power in small things. This ‘smallest of all seeds’ takes over. It was not a welcome sight in an agricultural setting. It was a weed that, once it took hold, grew exponentially and smothered the ground around it. The preacher can point to ideas of just and equitable sharing of resources – unwelcomed by the powerful few who want to control everything. When we unite with those who struggle at the margins, we, like the mustard seed, can create a place where people can rest and nest safely.
- Yeast, too, is expansive, and the image builds on the one before. While the mustard seed offers a tree so large birds of the air come and nest, yeast feeds many when mixed with flour and water. We are called to be yeast in the world, the agent of change – change that feeds the world.

## Acts 1:1-11

- Verse 1: Theophilus means God-lover, so this text is personal. It is speaking directly to the reader, reminding them of the story of Jesus up to the Ascension. The text continues speaking directly to the God-lovers – you are now to take up God’s mantle.
- Verse 3: He presented himself alive ‘by many convincing proofs’. Through our actions, our solidarity, our stubborn work for justice, we prove him alive, and we evidence the life, lessons and love of Jesus Christ. In the face of injustice and inequality, we are united by hope.
- Verse 11: ‘Why do you stand looking into heaven? He will come in the same way you saw him going into heaven.’ Jesus breaks into our shared world in the same ways – when we love each other, when we share our bread, when we put the needs of the world ahead of our temporal wants.
  - What are the proofs of our faith? It’s when the disciples have come together that they begin to look for the restoration of the kingdom. Christian Aid seeks to be a global movement of people coming



together, to be part of the restoration. As we seek to be part of this restoration, the pace of change can feel frustratingly slow. But we take heart in the promise of the Spirit guiding and flowing through this work.

- What are the ways in which we can widen our lens of justice so that our witness is truly 'to the ends of the Earth'?
- 'Why do you stand looking up to heaven?' It can be tempting to let our frustration turn to apathy, leading us to throw up our hands and wait for divine intervention. But while we wrestle with (often righteous) frustration at the way things are, there is work that we can do now.

## Luke 24:44-53

Jesus is speaking to his followers who are bewildered by the events of Christ's death and working out what they do now. As he does with the travellers on the road to Emmaus, Jesus reminds his followers of God's mission to heal, mend and transform the world. This is the message of the scriptures that they know. Despite all appearances, the kingdom of God is an unstoppable process. The perplexing events following Jesus' death are testimony to that. Not even death will stand in the way.

- Until now, Jesus has led and directed his followers. But now, they are now the ones who will pick up the baton and proclaim the time is here for God's liberation and justice. This must have sounded impossible for people who were struggling with bereavement and grappling with the strange experience of Jesus' appearances. But Jesus promises them that they will find the courage they need for the task ahead.
- The mission of the spirit is a thread that runs through creation, showing God's powerful and persistent purpose in action. The spirit has inspired women and men to join God in building a better world – one where peace and justice flourish and all people have the dignity of the children of God.
- Esther joins that story of transformation and hope. Her story reflects how she coped with bereavement, how she faced an overwhelming challenges and how her faith gives her the courage to hope. She says: 'When my husband passed away, it was a difficult period because I was heartbroken by his passing. Eventually as I knelt down and prayed to God, I knew that he was with him and I had to move forward.' As Esther came to terms with her grief after 39 years of a happy marriage, she experienced the transformative love of God in practical and tangible ways. She was helped in her sadness by the comforting support of her community and the financial protection she got from being a member of the farming collective set up by Christian Aid. The resilience of her pigeon pea crop reflects her faith and persistence.
- In every generation and in every place, people are called to take practical action to join with God to build a better world. Esther and her family are part of that. We too are called to join that work and through our prayers, gifts and actions to support Esther and the work of Christian Aid, we become part of that unstoppable transformation.

