

GOD'S HANDS, OUR HANDS, NO HANDS

What a difference a year makes. This time last year, congregations across the country were meeting, in person, to celebrate the start of Christian Aid week. People in our communities with a passion for social justice and a desire to see the divide between the world's richest and the world's poorest get smaller, were involved in street collections, Big brekkie's coffee mornings and sponsored swims, bike rides, runs and walks, all to highlight the work of Christian Aid and raise funds. The average sum of 7 million pounds, is raised nationally, for Christian Aid in the normal way, during Christian Aid week. But not this year. And yet, more than ever, as we find ourselves living through the global pandemic of coronavirus, the poorest and the most vulnerable on the earth, will find themselves on the bottom of the heap, needing our help and support.

Of course, when you are going through a crisis yourself, it is very difficult to have the emotional energy to be mindful, and indeed be willing to reach out to others. Our readings today, might have been written for such a time as this. Readings, containing not only hope for the future, but practical, spiritual resource for today.

Psalm 31 expresses the honest emotions of grief and lament that many of us are currently experiencing. The speaker of the psalm is under profound threat from enemies that endanger life, and straightaway he reaches out to God for help. Listen to me, Lord, he says. Be to me a rock, a refuge, a strong fortress, for I am in trouble. I'm caught in a net, and I can't seem to escape. My only deliverance and rescue, is to be in your hands. Later in the psalm he remembers that his times, basically, his life, is in God's hands, so he trusts in God's love

and care of him. That feeling of helplessness and uselessness, may be something that we don't often experience in this country, if at all in our lifetimes. But we are certainly feeling it now. I remember a few years ago reading in a Christian Aid magazine the story of a young widow in Africa, with four children, having had to leave their home and small-holding to flee for their lives from rebels, to live in very inadequate accommodation, and relying on support from Christian Aid. There was a photo of her reading her treasured possession, her Bible, and she was reading this psalm, Psalm 31. She knew what it was to have fear, but she said, 'This psalm has strengthened my faith, and I know that my life is in God's hands. As we enter this very unusual Christian Aid week, with our unaccustomed feelings of fear and helplessness, may we too, strengthen our faith by God's word, and know that we are in his hands.

These were the teachings of Jesus to his disciples when he was eating his last supper with them. He knew what was going to happen, and he knew that they would find it hard, that their world would be turned upside down at his death, and that even after they knew and believed the truth of his resurrection they would need hope, and practical, spiritual resources.

So firstly he does what Jesus always does. He gives them something visual to remember him by. He kneels down in front of them, taking the position of a servant, and with his hands, his hands that the next day, will be nailed to a cross, he washes their feet. So having given a practical example of how to follow him, he speaks to them about where he is going, and that they are not to be troubled, but believe. He tells them that he is going to the Father, and that they know the way. But Thomas pipes up, No, Lord, we don't know

where you're going, and so we don't know the way'. The honesty of Thomas, is an honesty to be welcomed in these difficult times. We share his uncertainty, as we don't know what lies ahead. Coronavirus has disrupted all our routines and our familiar way of life, and has many of us saying, 'we don't know the way'.

But Jesus says, just look at me, and then you will know the Father, and you will know the way. But then Philip, anxiously says, No, you need to show us the Father!

Having spoken earlier about dwelling places, places where you live, Jesus tells them that the Father dwells in him, and he in the Father.

We are only too aware of our dwelling places, at the moment! Some of us can't leave them at all, and whilst we might feel safe in our familiar surroundings, we would rather be able to leave and come back to our dwelling places as we wish and not be stuck in them all the time. But this gospel offers us the invitation to spend time – and we've certainly got loads of that! – dwelling in the presence of God, and to not let our hearts be troubled. When we are finally able to leave our homes we can still carry this dwelling place in our hearts wherever we go. That will and that desire is in our hands.

May we be able to take strength from our time with God to consider what we can do in response, in these unprecedented times, - In these unprecedented times when we seemingly have no hands, or at least no hands that we feel we can use. Whilst we can't use our hands for the usual things in Christian Aid week, like holding a collecting tin, frying eggs, baking cakes, or steering our bike, we can use our hands to pray. In the middle of the last supper, Jesus encourages his disciples to ask him for anything, and he will do it. And he repeats his offer, in case his disciples haven't quite

understood. These are certainly hard words for us to understand when so many of our prayers have seemingly gone unanswered these days. But Jesus wants his followers to remember these words when he is no longer with them, for they are words of hope and a promise of connection. These prayers are to be made in the name of Jesus, out of the relationship they have with him. And the answering of the prayers does not serve the one who prays, but so that 'the Father may be glorified through the Son'.

So let us remember that whilst we might be in lockdown, whilst life might be very different for us at the moment, whilst we might feel isolated, we are not in the helpless situation of having no hands. We have hands that can pray, and hands that can give. We can pray that in a situation where need is even greater across the world, Christian Aid will be able to provide support, hope and love in action. And whilst we may not be able to raise 7 million pounds this year, there are many suggested virtual ways in which you can help to raise funds on the Christian Aid website, and of course, you can give directly, by going to [caweek.org/payin](https://www.caweek.org/payin).

Things may be very different this year, but it's not a case of 'no hands', but more than it's in our hands, because we are in God's hands.

Amen