

Sermon 14<sup>th</sup> May

Christian Aid week 2021

Micah 6.1-8 / Mark 2.1-12

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6.8

Each year in May we mark Christian Aid Week. We have a special collection, learn more about some of the projects our money goes to support and hear about how the lives of individuals and families will benefit as a result. And we do something similar in October when we support the Bishop of St Albans' Harvest Appeal, as part of our grateful response to God's goodness at our Harvest Festival. There is always a note of hope and optimism in the stories we hear; we are encouraged to help people in far away places to improve their lives by planting new crops, learning new agricultural or building techniques, gaining access to good child care or developing better sanitation.

This year's story is similar but different. It tells us about Rose, a grandmother in Kenya who has to walk for hours a day to fetch water. But it hasn't always been like that. When she was a child, Rose remembers how often the rains would fall, giving fruit to the baobab trees and providing plenty of nutritious food to eat.

'When I was a young girl, there was plenty of food,' Rose says. Now, the rains are totally unreliable. The climate crisis has created extreme weather and Rose's community are feeling the brunt of it.

Instead of a story of development we have a story of regression, and we in the western world bear the responsibility for it. Through our exploitation of fossil fuels which powered the industrial revolution and helped to create our wealth we have contributed to global warming and climate change, and that climate change is affecting many of the poorer countries of the world already.

So what can we do in response?

In our Old Testament reading from Micah, God calls upon the mountains and the hills, the foundations of the Earth itself as witnesses for the prosecution of Israel. Back then, nature was called to testify to the selfishness of the people and the injustices visited upon the poor. Now creation might be summoned as a wounded victim too.

God rejected the Israelites' elaborate rituals and sacrifices, not because worship is unimportant but because they were using it as a way of avoiding their real responsibilities. And so God presents them – and us - with a more radical challenge in those familiar words of Micah 6:8: 'what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

### Do justice

God requires us to do justice by those who are the worst affected yet least responsible for the climate crisis. To amplify and join with their voices in the call for climate justice, as well as giving generously to our appeal, you can sign the Christian Aid climate justice petition – find the details on their website. And you can talk to your friends and neighbours to make them aware of your concerns.

To do justice also requires justice for the Earth, to acknowledge that the raging fires, flooding rivers, and species extinction are a result of the grave injustice of exploitation. We must learn to live in harmony with the natural world, and one crucial way to do that is by reducing our own carbon footprint. Some actions are easy: we can drive our cars less and turn the thermostat down a notch. Some take a greater change of habit, like flying less, eating less meat and dairy. Some need significant expenditure, like changing to a more fuel efficient or even fully electric car. But it can be done.

As a church, we have recently changed our electricity provider so that we are on a green tariff. The gas heater in the Hall has broken down and we are using the opportunity to change to radiant electric heaters which are more expensive to buy but use less energy (and, being electric, it will be green energy). The biggest contribution to our carbon footprint comes from our oil-fired heating system, so we are planning to instal heat pumps, either ground or air sourced, when we build our new extension.

You can find out more about our commitment to becoming an Eco Church at our Annual Meeting this Thursday when our Eco Church team will give a short presentation.

### Love mercy

God requires us to embody loving mercy and kindness. This, of course, demands that we act with compassion for the wounded creation and for its

hurting people. But it also begs what may be the more difficult question: how are we to show mercy to those who continue to reject the radical changes that are needed for a climate crisis to be averted?

Perhaps we can hope that even the most ardent climate change-denying politician, or the most active carbon-emitting company has the potential to change? Perhaps we can even show ourselves mercy for any guilt we may feel for our own carbon dependency. Such mercy might save us from silent shame and allow us to add our voices to the call for change.

Walk humbly

Walking humbly means turning to God in prayer, in continuous and collective prayer for the planet. This year, you can join the Christian Aid prayer chain where Christians across Britain, Ireland and the world will bring prayers of repentance, petition, praise and thanksgiving. And we can all commit to praying regularly, both in our services and in our private prayers, for action to reduce climate change.

Prayer leads to action. In setting our hearts to seek God, we galvanise our courage to do justice and love mercy as we respond to the challenge and join in the mission of God in restoring the Earth.

Justice, mercy and humility are at the heart of Jesus' message as he proclaims the kingdom of God. In today's story we see evidence of all three: God's justice and mercy are exercised in forgiving the paralysed man his sins and healing him of his disability, and Jesus models humility by putting this social outcast front and centre, accepting his intrusion, interrupting his own teaching to heal him and provoking the anger of his opponents as a result. Time and again Jesus disrupts the accepted hierarchies of status and social convention to demonstrate love and service of others.

The challenge to us, whether we are confronting the evils of personal sin and selfishness or the corporate greed and political inertia which is allowing our planet to suffocate, is to pray and act for justice – before it is too late.