

# Sermon Notes

## Harvest 2018

These sermon notes for a Harvest thanksgiving service are based on Proverbs 8:1-6, 18-21 and Luke 8:1-15. They explore the story of Aster and a group of powerful women in Ethiopia who are harvesting change. Their solar shop is not only earning a better living for them today, but a better way of life for us all tomorrow. These sermon notes focus on Luke 8:1-3, but we have included the Parable of the Sower and further thoughts to unpack that iconic story. Sermon pointers based on the Creation Time Lectionary and the Harvest Appeal are also included.

### **Collaborative eschatology:**

#### **The 'Come and do it with me' command**

- Jesus issues a clarion call throughout the gospels. In much of his teaching, he is saying: 'Come and do it with me! Stand together, journey together, work together.'
- We are the Body of Christ, called to work together for a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. We're all entitled to a share of the gifts God's abundant world blesses us with.
- God's creation, our planet home, was created to flourish with humanity, not in spite of it. Aster and her sisters in Ethiopia are bringing renewable technology to their community, financial resources to their families and a sense of pride and hope to each other.

#### **Powerful women bringing change**

- 'These women saw in Jesus their liberation, and it was worth investing everything in!' This was a statement made during an intercultural biblical dialogue, an exchange between Christian Aid's partner in Bolivia, and a Christian Aid group in Dunblane, Scotland, where we discussed Luke 8:1-3 together.

- In our story in the Gospel of Luke, these women didn't just accompany Jesus, but they provided for his mission out of their own resources. They shared their gifts, and were part of the active, inner group bringing about change. In stark contrast to many other accounts where women and men are both involved, it is the women who are named. Throughout Luke's Gospel, women's efforts are often celebrated and called to the centre.
- Equally, our Harvest project celebrates that strong, empowering spirit of collaboration and partnership. Together, we can make change for good. This year, we're invited to stand together with women in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Honduras as part of the Breaking the Barriers project. In all of these countries, it's women who are bringing light and health to their communities. This is truly inspirational.
- Women like Aster. As a woman in rural Ethiopia, Aster had no chance to earn a living. Drought and unpredictable rains mean that many women like Aster struggle to feed their children. But Aster refused to give up. She fought to create a better life.
- She came together with women in her village. Together, they now run a solar-powered shop. Thanks to training from Christian Aid's partner, they've turned this shop into a thriving business. They're living proof that together we're stronger and we're invited to join them. This Harvest, we're invited to invest in women's groups like theirs who are determined to use renewable energy to recharge their lives.
- Aster says: 'Coming together as a women's group, it's like adopting sisters; another family. They share my burden and help me face my challenges.'

- Aster and her 'adopted family' sell cold water at the solar shop, and also offer a place for all the community to charge their mobile phones. The shop brings in vital money for their families and vital technology that benefits her neighbours, including us!
- Aster's business means she can now pay for medical care and school books for her children. Her husband and the community are full of respect for what the women are doing. We are too. By giving to the Harvest Appeal and supporting the Big Shift campaign to renewable energy, we can stand with Aster and her sisters. Visit [caid.org.uk/big-shift](http://caid.org.uk/big-shift)
- Proverbs speaks of wisdom, and Aster and her sisters embody a wisdom so needed today. They are planting seeds that will harvest a better world for us all. The wise remind us that we are one global neighbourhood. The clarion call from Jesus to 'come and bring change with me' sings out this Harvest. Standing together, we can change lives with our collective power and energy.

### Women mean business

- In both Proverbs and Luke, we see empowered, strong women moving out of their traditional roles, calling and acting for the benefit of the whole body. In Proverbs, wisdom says:
 

Riches and honour are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.  
I walk in the way of righteousness,  
along the paths of justice,  
endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries.
- Enduring wealth and prosperity means we have to address climate change. We can't stand by while our neighbours go hungry from drought. We can't stand by while climate change causes chaos around the world. The Breaking the Barriers project highlights a new way forward, led by communities at the sharp end of climate change, experiencing unreliable rainfall and persistent droughts. Their wisdom is lighting the way.

### The Parable of the Sower

- This iconic text works perfectly with the Harvest theme, and offers some new insights into the very pressing challenge to any harvest – climate change. We face competing priorities and they each have a different narrative. The myth of never-ending growth, and stories told by the Earth and our most vulnerable sisters and brothers, all tell us about climate change. These seeds of wisdom are sown. Some are trampled by the powerful race to more things – more travel; more throw-away, convenient options. Some are choked by corporations and commercialism that feeds the status quo, and some will hit good soil and grow. Which seeds will we tend? Breaking the Barriers plants sustainable solutions in communities and lights the way to a better future for us all.
- Aster and her sisters have held onto and invested in a new way. They 'bear fruit with patient endurance.' This Harvest, we are called to stand together with them. They don't just need our money – they need our change!



# Creation Time

## Lectionary Reflections

Read more about Creation Time [here](#). The Creation Time Lectionary (CTL) was produced for use in the Church of England parishes of Pilton, Croscombe, North Wootton and Dinder in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. It is used with permission.

### Week one

(CTL Year B: Isaiah 55:6-13, Psalm 104:1-23, 2 Corinthians 9:6-12, Mark 4:1-9)

#### **2 Corinthians 9:9 'God scatters abroad, God gives to the poor; God's righteousness endures forever.'**

If we want to find God, we need to know what God is like. Otherwise, how can we recognise the divine presence? Paul says that generosity and a special concern for people living in poverty are two of God's distinguishing features. They are reflected in the whole of creation which is God's gift to us. Recognising that everything we have is a gift, and getting swept up into the joy of God's generosity, enables us to stop thinking of 'mine' and start thinking of 'our' and the bonds of humanity that connect us with all people. Being 'a cheerful giver' is the disposition of those who recognise that the act of giving brings us into the presence of God and unites us with our true nature.

#### **Mark 4:3 'Listen! A sower went out to sow...'**

For Jesus, what better image of God is there than a sower broadcasting seed so that it scatters indiscriminately and abundantly? You can imagine that the sower laughs for joy as the seed, the image of new life, is thrown openhandedly. The sower's feet are planted on the earth and in the sower's heart is the hope of new life. The sower's action is purposeful and courageous. The seed is precious and not all will grow.

But only by scattering the seed can the community be fed. Listen, says Jesus, and pay attention. God is present if you know where to look. Seek God and join in.

In our Harvest stories, we see the sower's generosity and courage reflected by Aster and her sisters in Ethiopia. The women work together and support each other in their solar shop. Their solidarity invites us to stand alongside them too. Together, we find ourselves bringing the Harvest closer.

### Week two

(CTL Year B: Genesis 2:4-7,15-24 Psalm 104:24-35 1 John 1:1-4 John 2:1-11)

#### **Genesis 2:23 Then the man said: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.'**

When it comes to who is most affected by poverty, climate change and discrimination, women and girls are at the top of the list. If we are ever to renew the world as God created it, to provide for everyone's welfare and wellbeing, then tackling gender injustice is crucial. That's why the Harvest Appeal focuses particularly on the lives of women, because their empowerment will lift the whole community out of poverty.

'Of the Same Flesh' is Christian Aid's theological report on gender justice. It recognises that the Genesis stories can be read in a way that reinforces gender injustice. But it advocates that being of 'the same flesh' reminds us that humanity is one and we share a common destiny that can only be secured when discrimination is ended.

#### **John 2:4 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?'**

From Cain onwards, the scriptures reflect the resistance that exists to God's will for creation, where all life and all people are interdependent. 'Am I my brothers' keeper?' (Genesis 4:9) captures the voice in us all that would prefer not to have to worry about the wellbeing of others and focus on ourselves.

Challenging that innate selfishness and inspiring solidarity is at the very heart of Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.

In this passage from John's Gospel, the one who highlights the need is Mary, and it is Jesus who seems to resist action. In a conversation reminiscent of a parable Jesus will tell about an unjust judge and a persistent widow, it seems that even Jesus needs to be summoned to act. The result, of course, is an extraordinary act of transformation and an outrageous overflowing of generosity. Here the nature of God's abundance is revealed in a feast where all have what they need and more besides.

In the lives of the women in our Harvest stories, we can hear that same challenge to recognise our responsibility for each other and stand in solidarity with one another.

### **Week three**

**(CTL Year B: Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Psalm 126, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, Matthew 6:25-34)**

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#### **Deuteronomy 8:10 'You will eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that God has given you.'**

The communities featured in our Harvest Appeal would dream of the farm land described in Deuteronomy. Instead the land they farm has been impacted by climate change and successive droughts. Creating a livelihood in these conditions is challenging. The reading from Deuteronomy reminds those who have good lands not to forget that it was not always like this. Once the Israelites were enslaved, once they were wandering in the wilderness, once life was hard and uncertain. Present comfort can bring a sense of complacency and entitlement. The reader is reminded not to imagine that their success is all their own doing. The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. This means that those who are doing well should not forget their obligation to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. It's no good those who are currently less affected saying: 'but the boat isn't sinking at my end'.

#### **Matthew 6:33 'Strive first for the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness...'**

Matthew's Gospel echoes the theme of ownership from Deuteronomy. The world and all that is in it always belongs to God and is for the benefit of all. But perhaps this is easy for us to forget. Sharing always seems more attractive when you're receiving and not giving. It also seems to be true that no matter how much we have, we want more. Jesus challenges this selfishness and says that the love of money is the root of all evil.

As a global family, we each have responsibility for one another. Injustice somewhere is injustice everywhere. How can we combat our desire to want more and more, always focusing on our own wellbeing at the expense of others? Jesus teaches the kingdom of God should be your first priority. Focus on the wellbeing of all and secure the common good. Turn away from a focus on your personal security and comfort because that can only be achieved when all have fullness of life.

### **Week four**

**(CTL Year B: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 Psalm 98 Romans 8:14-25 Mark 4:26-30)**

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#### **Romans 8:25 'But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience.'**

Why are we waiting? Following the death of Jesus, the new Christian communities might have expected they would see the transformation of the world that Jesus had proclaimed. However, it must have become clear, especially to the community in Rome, that this wasn't going to happen anytime soon.

In his letter to the community, Paul explores the scale of the change that is to come. Because all life and all things are so intimately connected, no part can be fully whole until the whole creation is transformed. Everything is linked by the Spirit of God that created all things. It's that same Spirit that resonates within us and prompts our hope of change. It's that same Spirit that summons us to join the process of healing, mending and repairing creation. Only as that movement gathers pace can real change happen.

The actions we take in solidarity with others are small but vital steps in that process. In that solidarity for justice we join the godly presence and the mission of the Spirit.



**Mark 4:26-27 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground... the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.'**

The transformation of a small, dry seed into a vibrant, green plant is amazing. The process even now seems beautifully mysterious. Without this transformation, there is no food for the community and no seed for the next sowing season. It is literally the difference between life and death.

Communities such as Aster's in Ethiopia are vulnerable to climate change. At the same time, the ingenuity and creativity of her solar shop business shows that life can sprout in the most unpromising contexts. By developing more than one source of income, and using solar energy, Aster and her sisters are helping to tackle climate change.

The growth of the seed depends on a complex ecology of soil, climate and human intervention. It symbolises the extraordinary way in which we find ourselves dependent on one another, not only in our local community but in our global community too. There are so many vital connections necessary to secure life that the complexity is too great to capture. Jesus compares the kingdom to the seed. Our actions, and those of the women in our Harvest stories, may seem small and vulnerable but there is a powerful direction of travel that God has set. Justice is coming as our individual actions take root and bring change.

**Week five**

**(CTL Year B: Isaiah 40:21-31 Psalm 24 Revelation 21:1-7 Luke 7:1-1)**

**Isaiah 40:21 'Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?'**

Our Judeo-Christian faith is based on a vision of the world which is counter-cultural to many. At the heart is the assertion that God created the world. From this simple statement we understand that all things come to us as gifts from God who wants life for the whole of creation. It grounds us in the affirmation that in God's creation we are all connected, because the same Spirit has formed us all. This connection brings with it a responsibility not only for our own wellbeing but for the wellbeing of all things. It is a responsibility that we need not view as a burden but as an invitation to join God in the constant process of creation.

Our sisters in Ethiopia take their place in this re-creation by developing solar hubs, a sustainable and clean means of creating energy for the community. The women also renew one another in strength and spirit. Aster says: 'Coming together as a women's group, it's like adopting sisters; another family. We share happiness and sorrow together.'

**Luke 7:6-7 'I am not worthy to have you come under my roof... but only speak the word...'**

There are not simple divides between goodies and baddies in the gospel stories. It would be easy to think of the Pharisees or the occupying Roman forces as the enemy, but it's not that simple.

In Luke's story, the call for help comes from a high-ranking Roman soldier. The centurion might seem like the enemy, but Jesus' friends reassure him that he is in fact a friend of the Jews. The centurion himself recognises he has no right to call on the Rabbi Jesus but nevertheless hopes his urgent request might be heard. He does not ask for himself but for his slave. Despite the ambiguity of his position, he wants to do the right thing.

In a world of injustice, few of us are saints and few of us come with clean hands. Nevertheless, we too are called not to allow our sense of unworthiness to get in the way of doing the right thing. Luke records no comment from Jesus about the centurion's occupation nor about slavery. Only that the request for healing is heard. Justice is done in small steps by those least expecting to be heroes.

