

Easter 6 - Christian Aid Week and APCM 10th May 2026

Acts 17.22-31; 1 Peter 3.13-end; John 14.15-21

May I speak in the name of the Living God, our Maker, Redeemer and Giver of Life. Amen.

Today is the beginning of Christian Aid Week.

I want to tell you about Esther Saizi.

Esther lives in Malawi where she works in a farming cooperative which grows peas.

These are Esther's words:

'When my husband died last year, it took me a long time to recover.

As you know, when someone leaves, you become heartbroken.

No day would pass without someone coming to pray here.

Even people from the church would come to lead prayers here at my house, instead of me going to church.

It was by God's grace that my energy was restored.

But it was very sad and worrying.

But the support came from my neighbours and friends.

They would come and cheer me up with funny stories just to take away my depression.

I have two children, both girls. I have two grandchildren, both boys.

When my husband died, his last words were: 'take care of these children. Don't let go of them.'

I joined the project when I realised that my husband would soon be leaving us.

In 2019 Nandolo Farmers' Association came and let us know how to increase our pigeon pea harvest.

In Namibawa Cooperative, we sell our pigeon peas collectively and we are also running a bakery business.

Nandolo Farmers' Association, with help from Christian Aid, bought us an oven.

That's how we are now baking bread rolls with the pigeon pea flour.

...and people love them.

I have two grandchildren, Nespo and Emmanuel.

I want to raise them in the Christian way, and send them to school.

As we speak, Nespo is in nursery.

When the children come to visit me I feel good in my heart.

I am so proud of my grandson.

My daughter wanted some [carpentry] tools to realise a dream she's had since 5th grade.

She said she wanted to be a carpenter.

So I collected the tools for her, one by one.

I bought the last one she needed in 2019 with money made from selling the pigeon peas.

We used to sell the pigeon peas to unscrupulous vendors.

We didn't make any profits.

Now, we have opportunities because we have a spokesperson: Nandolo Farmers' Association through Christian Aid.

I have used the money to buy many more things including fertiliser to use in the fields.

That was the resurrection which is still happening now and makes us successful people.

And it's all thanks to the pigeon peas.'

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When I was watching the film that Christian Aid produced with Esther and her family, I was struck by her story's resonance with two particular themes from today's readings.

In our epistle, Peter's advice to his audience is wise and practical: Do good, do not fear and be ready to give 'an account for the hope that is in you' (v15).

As good Anglicans walking in the broad middle of the road of ecclesiological tradition, we don't talk enough about our faith. We're not natural evangelists. The prospect of taking our faith out into our week... being vocal seven-day disciples whose worship in church on a Sunday is a nourishing fuelstop on a pilgrim journey where we are ever-ready to share our faith with others... might feel a bit uncomfortable... not something we're all that confident about.

But, thinking about Esther's story, and following Peter's encouragement, what might it be like to give an account for the hope that is within us?

The other theme links Esther's story to today's gospel and it is that of **advocacy**. Remember how she said that in the past they'd struggled to succeed because they'd sold their crops to unscrupulous people, but: 'now we have opportunities because we have a spokesperson'. Esther and her fellow pea growers have an advocate.

The word that John uses in his gospel which the NRSV translates as 'advocate' in Greek is *parakletos*, which can mean: 'one called alongside', advocate, counsellor, consoler, comforter, encourager, helper... even companion.

In John 14, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his passion, building them up in the expectation that, though he must leave them, he is not abandoning them. He will ask the Father to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to continue to teach them and remind them of what he has already shown them: that true life... life in all its fullness... springs from love, given, received and communicated.

One of the spiritual tragedies of our time is the loss of personal relationship in daily life that has come about because of our increasingly automated and technological world. We are in danger of becoming spiritually dislocated... isolated and empty, aware only of our own needs and incapable of recognising the reality of other people. Jesus shows us that our neediness cannot be met by grasping at what we imagine will satisfy us. We need to recognise our emptiness and turn away (outwards?) from ourselves to the love that already embraces us.

A love that is given, received and communicated.

A love that, if we acknowledge its presence and allow it to overflow from us might just make an extraordinary difference to someone else's life.

As Esther sits talking outside her church in Malawi, happiness and hope shine out of her. She has experienced practical, human advocacy in the help that has been offered to her by Christian Aid. The Nandolo Farmers' Association is alongside her and her friends and is helping them in practical ways.

But she **also clearly knows** she's got an advocate in the Holy Spirit. Her hope comes from God. She **knows** a love given, received and communicated.

So this Christian Aid Week, of course we should learn more about the lives of Esther and people like her and give as generously as we can to help the vital work that aid agencies are doing throughout the world. But let's also allow Esther and her story to evangelise to us a little. Let's try prayerfully to engage with the sense of hope that she so readily gives account of in her life ...and wonder with God: whose advocate can I be this week?

To whom, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, God alongside us to comfort, encourage and teach, might we give account (through our words and actions) of the hope that lives in us?

Let us pray

Thanksgiving Prayer

God of broken bread and wine outpoured,
We give you thanks for the story of Esther
and her community of hope-filled advocates.
May we learn and be inspired to be part of such a community
that, guided by the Holy Spirit,
we may seek to communicate the love
that we have received from you,
until the hope that burns in us reaches to the ends of the Earth.
Amen.