

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 9th August 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Today in our service we hear about the work of the Christian charity Tearfund. Perhaps you know of their work bringing relief from poverty for countless people across many nations. Our speaker today is Stefan Kaye. Stefan is a member of Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge. We thank Stefan for being among us today.

From the comfort of our homes we gather to worship.

Whether through printed word, or through the gift of technology we are a community. Here we seek connection to God.

Come, let us worship God, shown to us through the risen Christ.

Hymn/song

Opening Prayer

Lord of all creation, through you all things come to be. We celebrate our interconnectedness in this modern world. We pray for the awareness to make full use of opportunities to signpost others to the One who gives meaning and purpose to all. In you all things are held together. We pray that we may be brought into harmony with your will and purpose for our lives this day. **Amen.**

(Andrew Kingston, Methodist Prayer Handbook 2017-18)

Bible Reading

Read Isaiah Chapter 58 verses 1-12

James Chapter 1 verse 27

Prayer of Confession

Father, you gave us the exhortation to embrace the widowed, the orphaned, the stranger in our land, but then you also gave us free choice. Forgive us for all the times we're just not up to it, and help us to get there, for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

(Sue Gripton, Methodist Prayer Handbook 2017-18)

Hymn/song

Sermon

Introduction

Hello, greetings to you all at Haverhill Methodist Church! My name is Stefan Kaye, and I am a volunteer speaker for Tearfund. Tearfund is a Christian relief and development organisation working with partners in over 50 countries around the world to bring help and hope in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the places where the need is greatest. In my day job, I'm a software engineer working for a company called Zinwave, based in the village of Harston just South of Cambridge – though of course since the end of March I've been working almost exclusively from my home in Cambridge. I worship at Eden Baptist Church, which usually meets in the centre of Cambridge, though not at the moment of course. For many years I served as a deacon before stepping down last year. I still look after the church's website and have been involved in continuing our church's ministry during these weeks and months of lockdown by editing pre-recorded services and helping things to run smoothly on the occasions we have been able live-stream parts of our services from our chapel building. Thank you so much for inviting me to explain something of Tearfund's ministry to the poor. I want to start by thanking every one of you who already support this ministry with your prayers and gifts – I hope to offer you encouragement that your prayers are being answered and that your gifts are being put to good use. For those not familiar with our work, I hope I can explain through our study of God's word together that care for the poor and oppressed in this world is a subject very close to God's heart, and deserves a high place on our own agenda as followers of Christ. I was due to come and speak to you in person last month, but unfortunately, like so many other plans and events, that could not happen – but I'm so thankful that you've invited me to contribute to your online service in this way. I'm grateful to God for the technology to be able to connect with you all today – in recent weeks we've offered many prayers of thanks to God for Zoom, Youtube and social media - who thought we'd ever say that! It's been incredible to see the church right across the UK adapt so well and so quickly to the changing circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Challenging times

We are in really challenging times. With a global pandemic that's affected millions, it has shaken us as a society to the core and changed so much of how we live. It's been a dark time for so many and we know that the Coronavirus crisis has affected so many of you. It has affected areas such as our freedom, movement, families, mental health and lifestyle. I want to let you all know that Tearfund staff are praying each week for you, for all of our supporters and UK churches. This is a time for us to remember what Jesus taught us, "you are a light on a hill, a city that cannot be hidden". This is a time for the church to arise. It's not a time for us to shrink back but for us to stand, and to stand boldly, so that our light would shine so brightly and clearly, in the middle of darkness and chaos.

Challenge and encouragement

The verses from Isaiah 58 that we read earlier are both challenging and encouraging – actually, that's how God like to deal with us! We receive His encouragement to us in the situations in which we find ourselves, but also His challenge to walk in ways that please Him. You see the people of Israel had become focussed on the practices of God but had forgotten to love people. They had committed to fasting and abstaining from pleasure, but they had left out the poor and needy. They were known for what they didn't do, instead of what they did do. It's easy for us to fall into that trap too, that to please God we mustn't do this or that, rather than on the positive things we ought to do. It's a caricature of the church that is popular with non-Christians, that we're all about "Thou shalt not!" God loves us enough to call us out on these attitudes – listen again to verses 6 to 8:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,

To set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry,

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?

When you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;

Then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Can you hear what He really desires, what really pleases Him? How we love those in need, how we love the poor, how we love those who are oppressed – this is what really matters.

He is calling us to this as an expression of true worship.

Lockdown reflection

Now, I want you to think about and look back with me, all that we have experienced so far with the Coronavirus crisis. For me personally, it's been a time of quite mixed feelings – on the one hand, unlike so many people, I've been able to continue to work from home full time and on full pay, which is a great blessing. On the other hand, at times the small office room that I use at home has felt a bit like a prison, especially when it has been very hot, and I just miss getting out and seeing other people so much – my family in different parts of the UK, my church family on Sundays, my midweek house group. Zoom and Youtube are great, but they're not the same as really seeing people face to face. I even miss my work colleagues! Just join me in a quick prayer right now: 'Lord, come and heal our land in Jesus Name, Amen'

Lockdown in a refugee camp

Now, imagine again all that you've felt and experienced in this time in the UK - but this time you live in a massive refugee camp in Bangladesh called Cox's Bazar! It's the largest refugee camp in the country. I want you to imagine that you are part of the Rohingya people who have fled Myanmar to this camp for safety and left everything behind. You've made it across the border into Bangladesh and are now living closely packed together with over one million others in a refugee camp. And then you hear the news that cases of Coronavirus have been confirmed in the camp. You look around you and social distancing is close to impossible here, you know that there are limited medical resources and no intensive care beds. In 2017, the Rohingya people fled to the refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. A recent article by the Guardian said that the camp is more densely populated than most of our busiest cities.

It is estimated that up to 70,000 Rohingya people are living in each square kilometre. Typically, 12 people occupy each tiny, crowded, make-shift shelter. This was already a crisis but in April, Bangladesh officials reported cases of Coronavirus, confirming the first case in Cox's Bazar – the area where almost a million Rohingya people are living in refugee camps. It's a global health crisis within a crisis. In the refugee camps, there is no space for social distancing, there just isn't enough space.

Many shelters share the same well water and toilet. Sanitation is poor, healthcare is scarce and illness is already rife because basic things like clean water and soap are in short supply. People's immune systems are already depleted from the lack of good nutritious food. It's feared that, if the virus spreads, it'll spread fast and the consequences will be catastrophic. We spoke to, our Country Director for Bangladesh who said this:

"It is difficult to deal with this complex issue as the resources are few, the infrastructure is not adequate and the medical facilities are not adequate....People are out of their jobs, particularly the migrants, the daily wage labourers and the poor & vulnerable. They are suffering due to hunger, unemployment and lack of health facilities".

Tearfund's response

Here at Tearfund, we believe God has called us to go where the need is greatest. Where it's messiest, where it's hardest, where it's darkest. Wherever possible, we work through the local church, churches just like yours, that support communities around them in places like Bangladesh, Colombia, Zambia, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These are the kind of areas in which our partners are involved: Prevention messaging: Many of the communities we work in don't have television or Internet access. There is a lot of false information circulating about Coronavirus, so we're working to ensure that people have the right information about the disease. Hygiene and sanitation: As we all know, hand washing is vital in preventing the spread of the disease. So we're helping to provide soap, disinfectant and clean water to vulnerable communities. Food support: For people who rely on day labour to earn money for food, lockdown has been devastating. So we're helping people to access the food they need.

Let's take a look at what's happening in a few of these places around the world: In Lebanon, what looks like hygiene kits are being distributed. In Colombia, vulnerable families are receiving food packages. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, faith leaders are being trained about the facts of Covid-19, in order to be able to counteract the false information that is being spread in many places. In addition, there is a serious shortage of clean water in some places, that Tearfund partners are helping to address, such as with this installation of a water tank at a health centre in the DRC. In Burundi – and certainly in lots of other places – people are being taught good hygiene practice.

This is, of course, something that needs to be known everywhere and at all times, not just in a pandemic. In addition to this, there is much more information on Tearfund's website, with reports most recently from the DRC, Afghanistan and Brazil.

Our response

All this is amazing, but there are so many more people and communities to reach! Will you help us?

Let's head back to Isaiah 58 for a moment - I love that it doesn't end with the challenge but the encouragement of who we are as God's people. Let's look at verses 9 to 12:

"Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."

To do away with the yoke of oppression; to spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed – this is surely our calling as the people of God. Wouldn't it be great if our church were known as "the repairer of broken walls", or "the restorer of streets with dwellings"?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby put it so well: "we cannot be content to go back to what was before, there needs to be a restoration of our common life". So what can we do today?

Prayer

We are asking the UK church to join us in *prayer* today. We strongly believe in the power of prayer, so please remember our partners and the communities that we work in. Pray for churches around the world to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their communities.

False claims about Coronavirus have led to violence in some places. Pray that the right messages will reach vulnerable people. Lockdown means that many people are not able to earn an income, causing people to face serious food shortages.

Ask for God's provision for families in need.

Pray God's protection in communities where social distancing is difficult or even impossible. Pray for vulnerable women and children forced to be at home even when this isn't a safe place for them. Pray for the success of hygiene and sanitation programmes among millions of people around the world who do not have access to basic healthcare. You can find lots of points for prayer on the Tearfund website.

Action

You can also *take action* today. Your financial gift today can help us to reach more people during this pandemic, like the stories we've just heard from Cox's Bazar. You can make a donation today towards our coronavirus appeal. Here are some examples of what your gifts can achieve, although all amounts, large or small, are equally welcome: A donation of £15 could provide 5 families with a month's supply of life-saving essentials such as soap and disinfectant. A donation of £50 could provide health training and food support to three families over three months. And if as a church, you gave a combined donation of £600, that could provide a community of 200 families with a month's supply of life-saving essentials. Details on how to donate to Tearfund's work appear at the end of this transcript. Please note that Tearfund is also a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee that has recently launched a Coronavirus appeal, so a proportion of any money donated to that appeal will come to Tearfund for use by our partners.

Conclusion

Thank you once again for asking me to speak to you about Tearfund's ministry to the poor; it's been a privilege. If you have any questions, please drop me a line, and if there is any way I can help you, I will – my email and postal addresses are at the end of this transcript. Alternatively, just get in touch with the lovely people from Tearfund HQ in Teddington.

I'd just like to finish by re-iterating the wonderful words of encouragement from Isaiah 58:10:

If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. God bless you all.

Hymn/song

Prayer of Blessing

A Tearfund prayer written in partnership with Christian retreat centre Ffald y Brenin to help our church speak blessing over our local community and blessing over the areas of need Stefan named in his sermon:

Heavenly Father, we take upon ourselves the mantle of authority that Jesus delegates to us and in his name we speak to every household in our area and say to you: We bless you in the name of the Lord. We bless your marriages that they may be strong and whole. We bless the relationship between each marriage partner that it may be loving, forgiving, merciful and strong. We bless every intergenerational relationship within each household that there may be peace, love and understanding flowing between each one. In Jesus' name we bless every network of wholesome and supportive friendship. We bless your health that you may be strong and well. In Jesus' name we resist any sickness or disease which seeks to invade this area and to every person we say, be well, be strong, be healthy. To any who are sick right now we say we bless you in Jesus' name with a speedy recovery. We bless your wealth that you may have plenty to replace poverty. We bless you to have enough to live and enough to give. We bless the work of your hands that whatever you turn your hand to which is wholesome may be profitable. We bless the local schools that they may be secure, safe places for teachers and pupils alike. We bless the children's capacity to learn and develop relationships and we bless their simple trust in Jesus, that their trust may grow and become enriched. We speak to the churches and we say we bless you in the name of the Lord that the Holy Spirit and the word of God may flow out from you in power. We bless the hearts of all who live in this area that you may be quickened to hear and respond to the voice of the living God. We bless all who live and work here, that the overflow of the blessings of the presence of the kingdom of God may fall upon you. Amen.

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

Lord, let us choose to follow you wherever you are and wherever you go: in the narrow lanes of the refugee camps, in the homeless hostels, hospitals and hospices, in the Foodbanks, in the streets and with the lonely. **Amen.**

(Laurent Vernet, Methodist Prayer Handbook 2017-18)

Coffee Time Conversation

- What word from God came to you through Stefan today?
- What action can you take this week in response?
- Please pray for the work of Tearfund and their partners.

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Make me a channel of your peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daGWdbrSGBM>

When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fExR7eOhJO0>

Love Divine, all loves excelling

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=21&v=ydWDjVWz7gY&feature=emb_logo

More Contemporary Music:

Everyone needs compassion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnXX8TbUX-E>

Great are you Lord (Tearfund Staff)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH5S66KGT4k>

Beauty for Brokenness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D81ZD1NDPyE>