

© usbc.org.uk/sermons
Sunday 10 May 2009

Christian Aid Week 2009



The Word on Love

The Word on Love

1. The look of love

God is love. 1 John, one of the last things John wrote, is laden with important truths, and this radical statement sits right at its heart. Jesus is the most perfect representation of God's love (1 John 4:9); the cross is the most loving act in history, setting in motion a powerful and life-changing chain of love.

Love sees others. God never turns his face away from those he loves (Psalm 22:24). John tells us we cannot say we love God, but hate those around us (1 John 4:20). Some scholars have argued that the hate John is talking about here is not rage or active hatred, but merely low-level contempt or indifference, working from the root of the Greek word which means 'loveless'. This is an interesting idea because there are many people we neither dearly love nor actively hate – many whose concerns are not ours – whom we simply do not see. But if we love God, we can no longer look away from these people. We are challenged to see them as God does – with great love.

Love is worship. 'We love because God first loved us' (1 John 4:10): God is the first source of love. Psalm 22:22-26 demonstrates how, as we praise God with an upward focus, our hearts are changed and we are given a new, outward focus. And so we continue our worship of God by loving others.

2. Love's flow

Love spreads. Love is relational and directional. *It cannot stand still:* As we are loved we must love in turn. 'I am the vine and you are the branches' (John 15:5). God's love moves outwards, through his people. As we are rooted in God, we are tied into God's family tree and take on God's characteristics (1 John 3:1). We begin to bear fruit – and God's love is made **complete** in us (1 John 4:12).

Love acts. It must respond practically to the needs we see around us: 'the poor will eat and be satisfied' (Ps 22:26). While hate could be indifference, or inaction, love is always active. 'Let us not love with words, but with actions,' says John (1 John 3:18). Nadia Kabula is a living example of this. When Nadia's father died two-and-half years ago, she had to drop out of school to take care of her five younger siblings while her mother undertook 48-hour shifts to provide for them. But Humanité Nouvelle's tailoring course has transformed her prospects. Nadia is confident that she can earn a good living from sewing and she is clear about her priorities: 'If God helps me... I will do all I can to take care of my siblings and my mother.' Nadia's is just one of the lives transformed by your support. In Kinshasa, thousands of children are forced to live on the streets, where violence and prostitution can claim their future as well as their youth. Christian Aid partner Humanité Nouvelle (New Humanity – HN) is reaching out to them.

Love costs. Often a high price must be paid *for love to move outwards* as *Nadia's story also demonstrates*. But sacrificial love is also often given through persistent, unglamorous or unnoticed acts, such as going house to house.

3. Love's power to change

Love promises a full life. In God's world there should be no half-lived lives. God's love brings life (John 10:10) and we must pass the chance of a full life on to others where we can: as God is our lifeblood, so we must be lifeblood to others.

Love promises hope for the future. 'Love always hopes' (1 Corinthians 13:7). The support Jimmy receives from Humanité Nouvelle keeps hope alive for him, and enables him to Jimmy Polo Kambili's family dream of a future again. Fifteen-year-old could not look after him. Now he sleeps in the marketplace with a group of friends. But he visits a drop-in centre run by HN to play football and gets advice, training and a good meal. For Jimmy, this support has given him hope to focus on a brighter future as a driver or mechanic, far away from the streets of Kinshasa.

Love is a powerful force for change. 'I pray that you may grasp how wide and long and deep is the love of Christ.' (Ephesians 3:18). As we love God and those we come into contact with, we bring about change and others see and are inspired by God's love in us – so the ripples spread and the change goes further. (1 John 4:12). This Christian Aid Week, we can use our spheres of influence to give, act and pray. And as we choose active love over inactive indifference, together we will create a powerful force for change.

Christian Aid is campaigning to combat climate change as a matter of urgency.



Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Americas, and the effects of climate change are making life even harder.

Hurricanes are a regular threat and the United Nations has warned they will worsen.

'There's a huge difference in the rains,' says Audelia Ramos, who lives in Santa Rita, a hillside village near a river.

And for Audelia, the effects of more extreme weather are compounded by local deforestation.

The village is now doubly vulnerable; to landslides and to flooding. Until recently it would be completely cut off in the winter, because the river would swell and wash the bridge away.

CASM: bridging the gap

Christian Aid partner organisation Mennonite Social Action Commission (CASM) has been working with Audelia's community to help them cope with the effects of climate change and deforestation.

It helped villagers develop an early warning system and evacuation plan, which kept Audelia's family safe during Hurricane Felix in 2007.

CASM is also supporting the community to reforest the surrounding hillside. And, to the delight of Audelia, it has helped the villagers to build a new bridge.

Your donations are invaluable to CASM and many other Christian Aid partners helping communities cope with increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.

Take action

Christian Aid is tackling climate change from its roots, not just dealing with the disasters.

We're campaigning right now for a fair and effective climate deal at the Copenhagen summit of world leaders this December.

You help lend your support to our campaign by taking the [Christian Aid Copenhagen Pledge](#).