

'What do you want for Christmas?'

Who has written a list for Christmas?

Or knows what they most want?

What's the present you are really hoping for?

Talk to each other ... Let's hear about the kind of things mentioned ...

For many of us – we think about 'things': games, food or other things ...

But sometimes – that's not what we most hope for.

Think about what someone who is being bullied might hope for ...

Think about what someone who feels that they have no friends might hope for?

Our first Bible verse is about that kind of hope, that kind of gift:

'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,

plans for your welfare and not for harm,

to give you a future with hope.'

Jeremiah 29: 11, NRSV

During lockdown and the pandemic many people had a really difficult time. Can you remember hoping you could be outside more, even go to school more, be with your friends more, see your family and carers more?

The Christingle has a candle to show that Jesus is the one who brings light and hope into the world. Many of us tried to spread that light in the lockdowns by caring for people and staying in touch by phone or zoom.

And then almost all of us were pleased to be able to meet again over the summer.

There are lots of people who have not yet had those hopes made real. The Children's Society works with children and young people who are lonely, isolated, afraid and bullied. They feel 'locked down' all the time.

Let's hear from one young person – Alyssa's name has been changed to protect her identity:

Let's hear Alyssa's story:

Alyssa grew up in a difficult home environment, where her dad was cruel to her and her mum, and that affected her mental health. Then she started getting bullied at school too. At one point Alyssa felt that she was completely overwhelmed, like she was drowning. Unfortunately Alyssa's school were not able to offer her the support she needed and she bottled up her thoughts and feelings.

'I would try and stay in the house as much as possible' she says'

'My life before the Children's Society, I wouldn't even consider it a life **PTO**

I'd refuse to go to school or I would pretend to be sick so I wouldn't have to go in. It wasn't healthy.'

Eventually, Alyssa came to one of The Children's Society's services and received counselling from Kerry, one of our project workers. This gave Alyssa the strength and tools to get better. Today she says:

'I probably would be dead by now without The Children's Society and I've noticed such a big change in myself. It brought back the Alyssa that I knew, that I love and everyone else around me seems to love, but I guess she got lost on the way before that. I don't know what I would have done without The Children's Society and I'm very grateful for everything they've done for me.'

Alyssa found a community of care through The Children's Society which helped her recover her hope. The care and help she received has enabled her to move forward in life and she is now really excited about what the future holds.

(Alyssa's name has been changed to protect her identity)

When we support The Children's Society – we can help children and young people like Alyssa to receive the Christmas gift they really need and want.

We're working with God to bring about what we heard in our first Bible verse:

**'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans for your welfare and not for harm,
to give you a future with hope.'**

Jeremiah 29: 11, NRSV

By celebrating this Christingle, we are helping The Children's Society to bring hope to others. By thinking about the hope God gives us, we can offer hope to people who might be frightened to hope.

Jesus doesn't want anyone to be frightened – let's hear our second Bible verse now:

Jesus said: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' (John 10:10 NRSV)

That's what the money we give to The Children's Society will help to do – bring abundant life – life in all its fullness – to those who need it most.

Let's hear that verse once again:

Jesus said: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' (John 10:10 NRSV)

Amen.