

Today we are celebrating and promoting the work of Christian Aid - now, I'm not here as your priest to promote Christian Aid, I'm not sponsored by them, and I'm not going to say by the end of this service you must be giving time or money to Christian Aid, but, I think it is important that we do celebrate and think about the type of work that they do.

Christian Aid, if you don't know, is a Christian charity which is all about social justice. It is tackling extreme poverty, helping those who are marginalised, and trying to empower those who have been pushed to the edges of society, worldwide.

Now, social justice is an integral part of Christianity, and it is an integral part of being Christian.

If we follow Christ, who helped those who needed it, and if we are told to love our neighbours, and if we are told when we see the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those who are naked or are sick or are in prison, and are told 'just as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me', I think we can all agree as Christians we are called to help those who are in poverty, who are marginalised, who have the deck stacked against them.

Social justice is an integral part of Christianity, and an integral part of being Christian.

This isn't to say we all need to immediately jump up out of our pews and start protesting and campaigning and marching. If you don't know what you're protesting for, and protesting against, adding noise to the argument is not going to help. Protesting for the sake of protesting will not help anyone, including the people in need, and your soul.

Remember, we all have different gifts from the spirit. And some people, some Christians, definitely have the gift of social action.

I remember at Westcott, at my theological college, you could see really clearly those people who did have that gift - they could understand the politics, they could understand the dynamics so clearly - but they could also understand what needed to be done. They knew which causes to fight for, and how to go about it. That may not be true for everyone - I know it isn't for me.

But, what we mustn't do, if you are one of those people like me, is take this line of thinking which says, other people are better at this than I am, and turn that into 'well this has nothing to do with me'

Where you're sat there thinking, 'I don't understand this stuff, but they do, so I'll just leave it up to them to sort it'

And that is really easy to fall into at the moment, isn't it? When we have such huge scales of poverty, of suffering, of unfair systems, it's really hard to feel like we can do something about it, isn't it?

It's like being told 'could you just move this huge bouncy castle, that's the size of a house and has weights in the bottom, across town, by yourself?' ... you don't know how you'd go about it, where you'd even start? cause you might be able to hold on with a tiny fraction with your two hands, but that still leaves the rest of it, the rest of the job?!

And when we're faced with these huge problems of world hunger, of suffering in war, where nameless people by the thousands are suffering, it feels like the tiny fraction we can grab hold of with our hands feels pointless.

So the easier thing to do is just to disengage. To think someone else will do that. That person, who understands all of this much more than I do, well I'll leave it to them to handle it.

However! However.

It's here that I'd like to take the words of Pope Francis. Now, this quote is from the film the Two Popes, but it's also reflected heavily in his own words from his autobiography, just phrased differently, so I don't mind attributing these words to him, as he's said almost the same thing at other times...

The quote: 'We are seeing a globalization of indifference...We've become used to the suffering of others. It doesn't affect me. No one in our world feels responsible. Who is responsible for the blood of our brothers and sisters? **PTO**

The refugees washed up on the shores of the Mediterranean? I don't have anything to do with it. Must be someone else. Certainly, not me. When no one is to blame everyone is to blame.'

When no-one is to blame, everyone is to blame.

When everyone, thinks, 'oh I don't really understand this social justice stuff, I'll leave it for someone else who does understand', everyone takes a step back. Everyone passes the problem onto the next person. Everyone waits for someone else to deal with it.

When no-one is to blame, everyone is to blame.

So when Jesus tells us, 'a new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another... as I have loved you, that ye also love one another'

That's not, love one another if they live nearby. That's not, love one another if you know their name. That's not, love one another if you can work out if they're the good guy, the blameless one in the situation...

It is 'as I have loved you, that ye also love one another'

So, my friends, while some of us are much better at handling those situations which are delicate, which are tricky, which are political, where suffering does abound, the rest of us don't just get to turn our backs.

We don't look at the scale of the problem, and decide it's just too big to comprehend - like that bouncy castle - because that doesn't make it any better.

Because, not only are we people called to love - to love one another... not only are we people called to social justice, as an outpouring and a practical expression of that love... we are also a people called to hope.

We, as Christians, have hope in our hearts. We hold that hope in our hearts just as we hold faith and trust in god in our hearts.

And as people of hope, we hope not just for ourselves, but for others. And not just for others, but for those who can't hope for themselves right now.

So, while the task may be huge, and we might have varying degrees of how good we are at getting involved in these things, our love, our sense for justice, and our hope, means we have to do something.

Whether that is getting involved in the situations practically, or praying for those who do, or providing them fellowship or financial support... we don't do nothing.

We can't do nothing, because in those people is Christ.

So, on this Christian Aid Sunday, thank you to all those who, in their own ways, already do something to help others, and, as I draw this sermon to a close, please don't let this message of helping others end here.

Amen.