

The Work of Compassion UK

The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service on 13 January 2019 by the Revd. Clare Nelson (Regional Partnerships Manager for Compassion UK), in Beverley Minster.

Isaiah 43: 1 – 7; Luke 3: 15 - 17, 21 – 22;

Well it's wonderful to be back in Beverley. I've seen a few faces here this morning that I recognise already, we lived here until about five years ago. It's wonderful to be back with you, especially to be here on behalf of Compassion. Compassion, for those of you who don't know is an organisation that's doing great work to change the world in which we live. Helping some of the world's very poorest children. We're currently supporting more than 2 million children around the world through churches in some very poor places in the world - and this is supported by 1.3 million people sponsoring children. That means supporting children financially but also relational. It really is an amazing example how God's love is changing the world and I look forward to telling you a little bit more about that later on.

I'm guessing that one or two of you have heard of Compassion already. God bless you. It is an amazing thing that you're doing and for those of you who aren't yet involved I'll tell you a little bit more about how you might like to get involved later on, but I've been sponsoring a child through Compassion now for more than 10 years and to say that it's changed my life, transformed my life is a complete and utter understatement. Yes, it's enabled me to do something to really make a difference in the world, but it's also taught me so much about myself; about what I believe, even so much about God himself.

There's nearly 4 million children around the world today living in extreme poverty. Can you imagine it? Real children who don't even get the basics, living in the most awful, hard circumstances: complete and utter hopelessness; they are hungry most of the time; they don't have decent shelter; they don't get medicines and healthcare so they're not healthy; they get little or no education; they're exposed to all kinds of abuse, neglect and exploitation; and have no hope ever of having a decent life. Compassion as an

organisation is committed to reaching and helping as many of these children as we possibly can and giving them hope for a better life.

Why do we do this? Well I think as Christians we know that this isn't how God intended the world to be. But also as Christians we have God's power and His authority to change the world. We are reminded in the reading from Isaiah this morning that throughout the ages God has sought to redeem and reconcile and restore His people to him to bring in His kingdom as He intends it to be. That's a kingdom where there is no injustice, where there is no brokenness, where there's a good life for all people. That's exactly what Jesus made possible for all of us. It's what we've been celebrating at Christmas. Can you believe it was three weeks ago? Not that long ago.

At Christmas we celebrate Almighty God Himself: Emmanuel; with us; come to Earth to redeem us and to restore the world to how it's meant to be. It's amazing isn't it? But you know what I find most amazing and that is that although Jesus is Almighty God, he doesn't come to save us with force and with fear, but with love, the relentless love of God for His people. There's no force involved: always we have a choice as to whether or not we accept Jesus for ourselves; whether or not we follow him and follow his teachings; whether we do God's will and allow him to change us and to change the world around us. Jesus himself made that choice.

Today's the day that we celebrate and remember the baptism of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed one. When Jesus deliberately and publicly chose to align himself with and submit to God's will and when he received the Holy Spirit to empower him to fulfill his ministry. We're not talking here about empowerment as in force, but the power of love: the unstoppable power of God's love for His world and His people. And you know, this is the exciting part, that same power is available to us, you and me as followers of Jesus: the power of Almighty God working in us and through us. One of the very clear promises in the Bible and Jesus tells us about this in Luke's gospel, is that if we ask for the Holy Spirit, God will give us the Holy Spirit. The bible is very definite about that, very clear promise. Why do you think that is? The Holy Spirit reveals God to us; shows us His truth; enables us to draw close to the heart of God; to know His

overwhelming love for us and for His world and empower us to live out that love and to see it change the world.

As Christians we're not just called to change the world: we're empowered to change the world. What do you think? Is it actually possible? Can we actually do anything to make a difference in the world? How do you feel about that? At the moment in the world there's nearly a billion people living in extreme poverty and the awful circumstances that we've just heard about. Do you think that the number of people living in extreme poverty today is going up or do you think it's going down?

I'm going to ask you to get active now: put your hand up if you think the number of people in extreme poverty is going up; if you think the number of people living in extreme poverty is going down. For a few of you, you're right. What would you think if I told you that the number of people living in extreme poverty has halved in the last 20 years - it's absolutely true. This is because of international efforts like the Millennium Development Goals (which largely have been successful), the work of big non-governmental organizations including big christian NGOs like Compassion, like World Vision, like Tearfund, like Christian Aid and any other organisation that you might be involved in, are all making a huge difference in the world: the world is changing. Praise God. Let's keep on playing our part. There are so many things that we can do.

Let me just explain to you briefly how Compassion enables us to do this. Compassion works exclusively through churches in some of the world's poorest countries enabling them to reach out to the poorest children. And provide them with a chance in life. Show them the love of God and change their lives. Compression programmes in local churches really work: we're not just providing aid, we're providing for a child's development enabling them to stand on their own two feet and have a good life out of extreme poverty. children receive all kinds of practical support, skills and opportunities through their churches: they get an education; they get to go to school; they'll receive supplementary food; they have access to medicines and healthcare and immunisations; they receive vocational training and skills training; all kinds of emotional support - everything that they need to have a decent brighter future. Above everything all children are taught the gospel and learn that God loves them. We are literally transforming the

lives of these children: 2 million children currently being helped and their families and ultimately their communities all lifted out of extreme poverty.

It really works.

All of this is funded by people like us, like you and like me in churches here, sponsoring children. It really is the worldwide church across the world working together to change lives with the love of God, just I believe as he intended it to be. Sponsorship cost 25 pounds a month, just over five pounds a week to sponsor a child, and as a sponsor you fund a child's entire development and release from poverty and because you're a child's only sponsor you get to be involved in the life of the child that you're helping: involved in their development; praying for them; exchanging letters with them; getting to know them; getting to know their dreams; encouraging them to pursue their dreams and achieve their dreams; watching as your child grows and develops.

Sponsorship gives each one of us the opportunity to share God's love and our blessings, and see it make a huge difference in the world. It really works and it feels great. What I found is that the privilege of being involved in relationship with my sponsor children, hasn't just changed their lives, (although actually it has changed their lives: two of the children that I sponsor are currently at university - without my support they wouldn't even have gone to school. You know it cost me just over five pounds a week. Is it worth it? You know it's a no brainer really isn't it) but it's changed my life, completely changed my perspective on things, has profoundly impacted not just my life and how I live my life, but actually what I believe and how I believe: it has profoundly impacted my faith.

If it's something that might interest you, I have a little group of children here who are currently waiting for sponsors. They are all desperately needy children. I'll introduce you to just one of them. Don't know if you can see that from here, a little girl called Christine, she's 5. All of these children are being helped by the same church in Uganda. I'll tell you a little bit about what life is like for children like Christine who live there. The house where she lives has a dirt floor, grass walls and a grass roof. It is a one-roomed house without very much in it, certainly no electricity, certainly no running water and certainly

no toilets. The regional diet where she lives is bananas and beans. She will get one meal of beans and bananas a day. If her parents can find some work as day labourers, animal herders, where her family lives, the income will be about 10 pounds a month. She's just a normal little girl, she likes art and drawing and she likes jumping.

Compassion gives each one of us the opportunity to change the life of a child like Christine and I invite each one of you to think about doing that today. All of the children that I have this morning are all being helped by the same church in the eastern part of Uganda, which means that if you choose to sponsor a child you'll all be sponsoring children in the same place. So it provides a fantastic link between you here at Beverley Minster and the church that's helping those children like Christine.

Sponsoring a child for us is such an easy thing for us to do, but it's so wonderful, so wonderful it's a small step for us, just a willingness for us to allow the mighty power of God's love to flow in us and through us and we will see for ourselves - I am seeing for myself - His love changing the world through me, through us. Just how he intended it to be when he sent us Jesus

Thank you so much and God bless you.