

Hope in times of Crisis

In her village in Zimbabwe, big-hearted Janet Zirugo, 70, has seen first-hand the desperate hunger drought causes, and she reflects on a particularly painful time:

'One year, there was so little food. Rains had not fallen. We ate things which we wouldn't eat in normal times. I made porridge and gave it to the children, then removed a portion and put it down for the dogs. The children picked up the dogs' share because they weren't full. When I saw this, I knew the situation had become unbearable... My heart was so painful thinking that my family would die. By God's grace we did not die. We soldiered on.'

She's the sole provider for the children in her family, many of them orphans. Love is Janet's superpower – it gives her the strength and courage to keep going, even in the hardest times.

'God gives me the power to plough my field to help my family.'

With faith, hope and love, Janet brought her family through this time. With all her strength, and with her husband John at her side, she works on her farm so her family - and her neighbours - never again go hungry.

Her drought-resistant seeds are now blooming into a garden of plenty – bowls full of groundnuts, wild fruit, golden corn; a rainbow of colour.

The new storeroom she's built keeps her harvest safe and secure, which helps her bounce back in future droughts.

God be with me and my family. Please look after them, Lord. Look after my livestock, my husband, and me too. Give me strength to fend for my family. Amen - Janet's prayer.

This is one of the stories that Christian Aid has shared for us to reflect upon during the Christian Aid Week. And now we will try to connect this reality with the reality of the promise of the Bible passage for today.

The Book of Revelation not only is the last book of the Bible, but it is also one of the most enigmatic books, one that is full of codes and visions, that it puts people off: "I don't understand it." Personally, I love Revelation. There is a reason for the enigmas; it was written at a time of persecution for the early church when the roman emperor was against the emergence of Christianity. Only the emperor could be called 'Lord' and yet this book is full of the word Lord but applied to God. It was considered subversive by the empire, and people died because of this. The codes were there so that the followers of Christ would not be discovered, and that is why they talk of the present as if it were long past; instead of Rome it refers to Babylon; instead of the emperor it speaks of the Beast, and so on. It is also a Book deeply connected to the beginning of the Bible, to the Book of Genesis, and the reading today is very clear about this.

Compare the river of the water of life, and the tree that bears fruit, and the leaves there for the healing of the nations. This is inspired on the Garden of Eden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad, and compare the fruit of Eden and the fruit here. And remember the curse in

Eden and what it says here: *no longer will there be any curse*. And God will reign for ever and ever.

This vision is the vision of life in fullness, this is what we say every week, as part of the service, and possibly you say it more than once in your own heart: **“your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread”**. And now we can compare Janet’s story to the reading today. How does the experience of Janet live up to the will of God? Is Janet responsible for what is not like God’s will?

In this sense I found it despicable to read the statement made by MP Lee Anderson says he has proven that people can make meals costing 30p. With the increase of fuel, and prices, this is an offense against the poor. Certainly not the promise of life in fullness the is in the Revelation reading for today.

Here we are, just as Christian Aid Week begins, and we can be part of the changing reality of life. The little we can do which will become part of Christian Aid projects the world around is one way that what happens in heaven will happen on earth, and all people will receive their daily food. God’s will made clear in Genesis, by which God was pleased with what he saw; disrupted by human vanity, pride, selfishness, ambition – to own knowledge independent from God, which produced pain, death, destruction – the curse of Genesis. It is our task not only to pray, not only to be part of the transformation but also to call out those who are part of the causes of destruction, of life and the earth. Because none of all that is Janet’s fault.

And here in Revelation, we hear that there is a curse no more, that the promise is water of life, the tree of life, the leaves of which will be rich in fruit and for healing. And the throne of God and the Lamb present. And today we affirm this when we celebrate communion.

We ask God to change things, and God says back to us – what are you doing for things to change (other than praying)? This is the challenge that Christian Aid puts before us, inspired on the will of God, made clear in the Bible – fullness of life for all people. So yes, this is our chance to be part of God’s will, in response to our prayer said so often. And as Christian Aid says in its strap line: **“We believe in life before death,”** and do you know what? God does as well, that is what Jesus – the life of the world- is still all about!

This then is our hope for these times of crisis. And the people of God respond: AMEN!