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*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, our strength, and our redeemer.*

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak today – we are coming from a small village further North in the County and the Harvest will start all around us very soon, so this is always a special time for us. The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament ends with a harvest but begins with a famine and - a family had to leave their homes and migrate to another country, since they could not feed themselves at home.

I saw this at first hand in Bangladesh forty-five years ago, in a famine when over a million people died. People in the North were desperate to get on trains to cities where they thought they might find food, and they died in the night on the railway stations. The famine was not mainly the result of an overall shortage of food but was caused by hoarding for profit within the country and the withholding of food aid internationally for political reasons.

So ten years later, living and working on the coast of the Bay of Bengal harvest was a joyful and spectacular event. From the roof of our bungalow, in every direction we could see small groups of people cutting sheaves of rice with sickles, balancing two sheaves on a bamboo pole and carrying them along narrow paths to the threshing floor. There a team of buffaloes were driven round and round a pole treading on the sheaves and separating the grain from the straw. Every few minutes the floor was swept and the grain collected; women held winnowing fans above their heads and let a stream of grain fall, while the breeze blew away the dust, separating the 'grain from the chaff'. It was a wonderful site and very reminiscent of Isaiah, Chapter 9, Verse 3 - *they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest!*

In those days we struggled hard to defend the land from the sea and, working with one of Christian Aid's partner organisations, to ensure that the farming families were able to get ownership of the land, and not have it grabbed from them by powerful landlords. Now, decades later I am working there again and happy to say that a fair and legal system of allocation of new land is working well. But now we face another challenge – the mean sea level is rising a hand's breadth every 10 years – and although that may not seem very much, it makes a huge difference in a whole country only just above sea level. We can raise the dykes – for a while.

**If** the world can come together and end the Greenhouse Gas Emissions which cause Climate Change and Sea Level Rise, that may be enough, but if we fail, the land which feeds these families will be lost again to the sea, and they will become famine – or climate – refugees.

In May 1985 I was at sea in a survey ship in the Bay of Bengal. We anchored close an island Urir Char, where I had been surveying not long before and in one night a cyclonic storm surge submerged the whole island and killed 7,000 people. A farmer I knew survived with one child – he could not hold on to his wife and the other children – they were swept away and drowned. We are building concrete shelters which are also schools to provide refuges from cyclones and save lives but we know from science and also experience that Climate Change is making extreme weather events more severe and more frequent.

Jesus Gospel of Love provides the response we need. By feeding Five Thousand he showed us the way – working together and in good faith we can overcome famines and build refuges from floods and cyclones.

He has also called us to love God's Creation, the natural world around us. Christian Aid has a vision of a better world, free from poverty, where everyone has enough to eat, and can live without fear of their home being destroyed.

Right now, millions of the world's poorest people are feeling the worst impacts of climate change, and experts predict more floods, drought and extreme weather patterns to come. For those living in poverty, this means more hunger, conflict and insecurity, and a more uncertain future for us all.

Climate change is caused by the so called '*greenhouse gas*' released from burning coal, gas, petrol or diesel changing the upper atmosphere and so heating up the whole planet. But a cleaner future is possible. Coal, oil and gas need to be left in the ground if we are to protect God's earth. We have already made progress – right now about two thirds of the electricity produced in Britain comes from sources, mostly wind turbines, which produce no greenhouse gases. But governments and big institutions still have money tied up in the extraction and burning these 'fossil fuels'.

Now more than ever, we need to make the big shift from dirty fossil fuels into clean energy for a better future for everyone.

So, with the support and contributions of communities like ours, Christian Aid is campaigning to stop climate change. Christian Aid also finds practical ways to help many, many communities around the world facing poverty and disease.

In a world with such wealth as ours, no one should suffer alone in such a way or go without food, shelter, security or any of the other basics we all need. So Christian Aid is working for and with people of all faiths and none, as well as with churches and other organisations, to **promote sustainable development, strive for social justice, pursue our vision of a world without poverty, and work to end climate change.**

*First*, we are asked to pray together regularly for those who are hungry and living in poverty, and those affected by floods, droughts and cyclonic storms resulting from climate change. We should pray for our leaders to make wise decisions and join with other countries in the Climate Summit in Glasgow in October to take quick and effective action to reduce fossil fuel use.

*Second*, please support Christian Aid in its campaign to end investment in fossil fuels by churches, pension funds and other investors and also consider measures we can take to make our churches, houses and cars climate friendly by using more electricity and less oil and gas.

*Third*, please consider making a donation, here or on-line to support refugees through the current appeal for those who have to leave Afghanistan, and in future to continue support for Christian Aid fund-raising efforts to help those living in poverty around the world. There is so much still to be done to share the love of God in practical ways and so many opportunities to do it!

William Blake famously wrote:

*"Love seeketh not itself to please, Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease, And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."*

I started with the story of Ruth which began with refugees fleeing a famine...Ruth and Naomi's story could have continued in a tragic vein but it didn't. They could have died in desperate poverty but they didn't. God's greatest desire is for human flourishing and for communities that prioritize helping those who are especially vulnerable. Will we be a part of that? Locally? Nationally? And Internationally?

So let us pray together:

We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;

For we know that You have made the world in a way that people must find their own path to peace within themselves and with their neighbours.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;

For You have already given us the resources with which to feed the entire world, if we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;

For You have already given us eyes with which to see the good in all people, if we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair;

For You have already given us the power to address poverty and to give hope, if we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;

For You have already given us great minds with which to search out cures and healing, if we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we rather pray to You, O God, for strength, determination and will power, To do instead of just pray,

To become instead of merely to wish. ***Amen***