

Sermon

15 May 2016

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: John 14:15-31

Watch Christian Aid DVD: Morsheda at the mercy of the floods.

Did you notice the stark contrast between our lives and those of the family on the video-clip?

We've seen lots of flooding in the UK this year, but not a single family I know of had to *stay* in a flooded home... Had to cope with literally *living* knee deep in filthy floodwaters, the breeding ground for diseases and lots of other problems.

Here in our country, help was offered from emergency services, from councils, from the government. The problems were taken care of, and although I'm not at all implying that the people affected by the flooding didn't have a dreadful time, I just think that we have the infrastructure here to cope better with disasters like that. And once something like severe flooding happens, the government takes the necessary precautions to prevent the same catastrophe from happening again.

And did you hear what that woman said about her wee boy? He rolled off his bed in the middle of the night, and if the splash hadn't woken her

up and she hadn't seen the ripples on the water, she wouldn't even have known what had happened – and he would have drowned. I worry about my boys falling out their beds too... When we are in an unfamiliar setting, like a hotel somewhere when we are on holiday... But what is the worst that can happen? They can bump their heads on the carpeted floor and wake up in the middle of the night... Talk about worlds apart!!

And that's another thing: Did you hear how the other woman, the one who received help from Christian Aid, refers to herself as *wealthy*? Because she had some livestock and her house wasn't under water. She looked so proud of her house – her wee one-room house made out of corrugated iron, with no electricity.

I don't know if we always realise just how very fortunate we are in this country?

Here, where we are sheltered against the elements and have the right to make our voices heard when we are unhappy about anything and there is a real chance that something might actually be done about our complaints!!

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Today we are celebrating Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who believe in God.

A wee while before this happened, we read in the Gospel according to John, Jesus explained to his disciples that he had to go away, but that they needn't worry – he wouldn't leave them behind all by themselves.

He would send them another Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, to be with them forever.

And true to his word, he did exactly what he said he would. He sent his Holy Spirit to all who loved him.

But he said something else to his disciples that day as well. He said: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” And what did Jesus command? That we should love one another.

To show that we love him, we should love one another. That’s it. That’s all.

In exchange for his constant presence in our lives, for eternal life one day, Jesus could probably have given us a long list of criteria to meet, and that would surely not have been unfair or too much to ask; but no. All he wants us to do is to love one another, so that, through our love for those around us, *his* love for the world will become known to all.

The thing is just – love is much much more than an emotion, more than words spoken to someone else. Love is something we have to *do*.

Jesus showed us real love – when he willingly let them hammer nails into his hands to hang him on a cross. For us. That’s the ultimate example of love – something you don’t only *feel* for somebody, something you don’t only *say* to somebody, but something you *do* for somebody else. Not because you’ll get something in return, but because it will change their lives for the better.

We have so many opportunities to show our love to others today:

- By noticing when someone is upset, and offering them an encouraging look or a tissue;
- By being there for our friends or family when they need someone to talk to;
- By offering to do wee things for our neighbours, things they would struggle to cope with themselves;
- By putting a few pounds in the red Christian Aid Envelope to support people like Morsheda and her family.

Do you know what Christian Aid's slogan is? "We believe in life before death." "We believe in life *before* death."

Through his Spirit, God makes it possible for us to *live* life, to not only *survive* it. Even in troubled times, we always have something to be thankful for.

God wants to change the world and take all people's hardships away. But let's never forget that we are very often the means through which he wants to do it.

God loves us. We know that. Let's love him back by loving others. Those close to us, those we are only acquainted with, *and* those we'll never even meet, but know about. Let's do for them what we would have wanted them to do for us if things were the other way around.

Because we can. Through his Spirit God will guide us and show us what to do and how to do it.

And then, if ever we are in any kind of floodwaters – emotional turmoil, unhappiness, a broken relationship, loneliness, drowning in debt, in sorrow, in worries, if we are ever left behind, bereaved, scared, unwell, confused, God will send us someone to become our bridge over troubled waters too.

Our *bridge over troubled waters*... That reminds me of the famous song by Simon and Garfunkel. God's Holy Spirit isn't only our Guide, he is also our Comforter. Listen to the words of this song (*while the organist plays it on the piano*):

When you're weary
feeling small
when tears are near your eyes
I will dry them off.

I'm on your side
when times get rough
and friends just can't be found
like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.

When you're down and out
when you're on the street
when evening falls so hard
I will comfort you.

I'll take your part
when darkness comes
and pain is all around
like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down.

Jesus literally laid his life down for us, and every single day, every single time we need it, God's Spirit becomes that bridge we so desperately need when we have to cross over troubled waters.

So let's love him back by becoming bridges ourselves to those who need it desperately, and make sure that no-one we know or know about have to live in a house filled with water or with worries.

And rest assured, next time those dark clouds linger above your life, *peer* through the rain and you'll see a bridge there for you to cross over too. Because that's how love works.

Amen