

**Sermon**  
**12 May 2019**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Acts 16:9-15

Christian Aid Sunday

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Today is Christian Aid Sunday. A Sunday set apart specifically to think about people all around the world who need help. Today we are popping in to meet a couple of women in Sierra Leone...

*Video Clip (Christian Aid 2019: Tenneh's story)*

There is just so much suffering in the world. It's hard to believe that these people we've just seen in the wee video clip are also living in 2019!

Delivering babies at night with only torchlights available; Have you noticed state of the clinic? A health and safety officer from our neck of the woods would probably faint in there... And if that was to happen, ironically, there would be no doctor to help!

Most women here look forward to getting pregnant and having a family. They put together a "delivery plan", decorate a baby room and buy everything we deem *necessary* for having a baby: a cot, a pram, a car seat, bottles, disposable nappies... And those who can't afford all these

things, will get help to make sure they are ready for welcoming their wee one into the world.

In Sierra Leone, new mothers have NONE of these things... Up until very recently being pregnant, delivering a baby and caring for an infant was something most woman *feared*, never mind looked forward to... But all this has changed because of one woman. Nurse Judith. She recognised a need and decided that she would like to do something about it.

It wasn't easy, because in her culture women don't make decisions by themselves. Their fathers or husbands are the ones who are supposed to take care of them. But what if your father dies; or abandon you, like Judith's did?

It took lots of courage and determination, hard work, and overcoming plenty obstacles for Judith to become a nurse. But she did it, with the help of God. And that changed the lives of all the women in her community.

Our Scripture reading today was also about a very special woman. Lydia. Lydia was just an ordinary woman, much like Judith.

We read that she was a worshipper of God, but that she came from the city of Thyatira. This means that she wasn't a Jew, but a Greek woman who believed in God. This already tells us something about her personality – she didn't just do what everybody else did, she did what she believed was right.

We also read that she was a dealer in purple cloth. Only the rich and famous and important people of those days could afford nice colourful clothing. It was a very complicated process to dye clothes, and this is what she did for a living. The area she came from was famous for the purple dye that could be produced there.

Not dissimilar to today, people in those days wanted to look cool and follow the latest trends, and if you wore purple, like the royals, you indicated to everybody that you could afford the luxuries in life. Wearing purple in those days was like wearing a designer outfit from someone like Alexander McQueen today!

Although we don't know much more about Lydia's life, we can assume that she was a widow. In Biblical times, just like in Sierra Leone today, women didn't have the same equality we have here – and for her to be able to invite a group of foreign men to her home without the permission of a man, indicates that she was in charge of her own household, which could only ever happen if you were a widow.

Most women in her position in those days wouldn't have been able to survive in her position, but Lydia didn't follow the customs, she followed her heart.

She was determined to make a success of her business, so much so that she had the means to take care of Paul and his companions when she met them.

I find it quite interesting that her job was to change bland, boring fabrics into something special – but that, metaphorically speaking, the same thing happened to her life.

When she met Paul she became the first convert to the Christian faith in Europe.

Now that was quite something! Although women had very few rights and hardly any freedom to choose what they wanted to do, Lydia opened her heart to Jesus and *knew* that she wanted to make a difference.

So she invited Paul and his companions over to stay at her house where she took care of them, and she did the same for many other Christians after them too.

Providing hospitality to others, caring for others, is what God *wants* us to do.

It's our responsibility as Christians to make sure that those around us are well taken care of.

But this is such an enormous task, it's sometimes much easier to just pretend that we don't know about the needs of others; or to just tell ourselves that there is *nothing* we can do about it.

And on some level it is possible to pretend that everything is okay. Because if you don't watch the news or read the papers, and only focus on what is going on in your *own* life, you could possibly convince yourself that the people next door to you or the people in other places all

over the world will survive without your help. After all, we all have our own problems to deal with!

And obviously no one person will ever be able to change all the hardship in the world. It's so easy to think: "My wee contribution won't make a difference in any case, so why even bother?"

But Lydia only did a small thing. Her new found faith made her open her door. That's it. And that was the start of the Christian Church in Europe. If she could only see all the beautiful churches and cathedrals in Europe today!

And Judith also only did one thing. She decided that she wanted to make a difference to the women in her village. And now, since she's qualified as a nurse, not a single baby in her village has died. And because of her determination, with the help of Christian Aid, they are building a hospital now. Can you imagine how many lives will be changed by that?!

The one small step both these women took in the right direction had a much bigger impact on society than they could ever imagine.

*So just imagine what your contribution can bring about!*

We live in an amazing country, where everything works. No woman in Scotland will ever have to give birth by torchlight or lose her baby because she doesn't have enough milk to feed him.

We have plenty of hospitals and nurses and doctors; we have clean sheets; beautiful clothes to wear and more than enough food to eat. All on our doorsteps.

Let's say thank you to God for the miracle of life by making sure that *this* is the case all over the world.

Let's be bold and take that step. Donate to Christian Aid, or any charity that makes a difference in this world; pray, volunteer, or reach out to those in need in any way you can; and do this for people on your doorstep or people in countries far from here. It doesn't matter what you do or how you do it – just don't do nothing...

Let's care.

Let's all be like Lydia. Let's open our hearts to the call of God and immediately respond appropriately.

Lydia transformed bland fabrics into vibrant, purple ones. Let's do the same. Let's change people's hard and sad lives into something special.

Once fabric has been dyed, there is no way of getting to back to the original colour. Ask any mum whose toddler has ever drawn a beautiful picture on her duvet cover with a sharpie!

If you change the "bland" in someone's life into something "beautiful", that will never go away.

And let's love. Because we are loved; By a God who gives us the tools we need to change the world; By a God who gives us courage, ideas, money, compassion... Let's use it, and go change the world, one wee bit at a time.

All it takes is one step... And if we *all* take that step, just imagine the change we could bring, the hope we could give.

So let's find our inner Lydia, and help the Judith's of this world to help others. And let's not only do it this Christian Aid week, but forever!

Amen