

Christian Aid Week 2025

Sermon notes



Abounding Hope

Thank you for downloading these notes to help you prepare your sermon or talk on the themes of **abounding hope, justice and love**. This pack can be used during Christian Aid Week 2025 or at other times of the year. You may also find our other worship resources for Christian Aid Week useful, including a film for churches and ideas for an all-age service.

All these resources can be found at caweek.org/Resources

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Aurelia's story

In the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala, 90% of people are living in poverty. The region is home to the Indigenous Q'eqchi' (Co-WAY-chee) people. Men in the community often seek work away from their homes, while many women grow crops to feed their families.

Aurelia is a community leader, a mother of eight and a beloved grandmother. Record high temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns have hit farmers like her hard. Water sources are drying up or being polluted by industry in communities like Aurelia's. Aurelia and her neighbours now walk for around four hours each day during the two trips they must make to collect safe, clean water.

Aurelia has seen first-hand the impact of the climate crisis. **'Climate change has been killing our crops, and this is our food,'** she says. **'As the plants are dying, the next thing that will die is us.'**

But she isn't giving up. Congcoop, Christian Aid's partner in Guatemala, supports communities with agricultural resources and training that help them to become more climate resilient. Aurelia took up the opportunity to gain new skills with Congcoop. She's combining her deep knowledge and understanding of her land with innovative techniques to make organic fertiliser, construct rainwater collection systems, and grow a wider range of crops.

Aurelia holding the organic fertiliser she learned to make with Christian Aid's partner, Congcoop.



With Congcoop's support, Aurelia is using her cacao harvest to make chocolate products to sell at a local market. **'I feel very joyful and grateful when I'm preparing chocolate,'** Aurelia says. **'I make cocoa products with all my heart! Perhaps that's why they have such a good flavour!'**

Aurelia has a big multi-generational family to take care of. But she's always looking to help more people in her community. **'I really give my life to my neighbours, sharing my knowledge with them,'** she told Christian Aid.

Life for Aurelia and her community remains tough, and as the climate crisis intensifies, she fears things will get tougher. Enduring droughts, storms and fierce heat, Aurelia can see the impacts of climate change accelerating. **'There was a prediction this would happen in the future,'** she says, **'but it has come earlier. This is very worrying for our kids and especially our grandkids.'**

'I want to tell donors to continue supporting Christian Aid,' Aurelia says, **'because through Congcoop, they've been supporting us.'**

Amelia's story



Amelia with her daughter, Yakelin.

Amelia is a resourceful and determined 24-year-old farmer and mum to two young children, 8-year-old Lázaro and 4-year-old Yakelin. She and her family also belong to the Indigenous Q'eqchi' community.

Amelia is the goalkeeper on her local football team and loves to make time for the sport when she can. She's also involved in planning events like baptisms at her church.

In recent years Amelia has found feeding her young children harder. She grows a wide range of crops to try to protect them from malnutrition but harvests are failing due to heatwaves and storms. Amelia told Christian Aid: **'In the past three years, we've been experiencing high heat and a lack of rain. It is very worrying ... there is no food for my kids.'**

The family's diet often consists of rice and homemade tortillas. They miss out on the fruit and vegetables that provide the vital nutrition children need to thrive. Some days it's even too hot for her son Lázaro to go to school.

Amelia has seen the nearby river drop significantly over her lifetime and many other local water sources have disappeared completely. Meanwhile, industrial plantations contribute to water shortages and pollution. **'It's not fair that people are exploiting our resources,'** Amelia says. **'We are the ones affected but we don't have anywhere else to go.'**

Amelia is proactive in her response to these challenges. She put herself forward as a community representative to work with Christian Aid's partner, Congcoop. She's learning more about planting schedules and methods to protect her crops, as well as how to grow more native seeds and keep animals such as chickens healthy. Four-year-old Yakelin loves to join her mum for training sessions.

Whatever Amelia learns, she shares – confidently training other women to adapt their farming practices too.

'For the future, I don't know what to expect ... The only one who can tell is God,' Amelia says. Living with uncertainty and food insecurity is a daily reality for her family. But through Congcoop, farmers like Amelia can access specialist knowledge that will support them respond to the climate crisis.

Christian Aid Week - Sunday 11 May

Acts 9:36-43

‘She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.’

There are figures in scripture who we only glimpse in a short passage, yet they are undeniably important. Our reading today gives us a small insight into Tabitha's life. But like a piece of stained glass, this small encounter can colour our worldview.



Aurelia making a traditional Q'eqchi' blouse.

- Tabitha has a vital place in a community of widows. She may have been a widow herself. Throughout scripture, our attention is drawn to widows as a group who are vulnerable in ancient society, often being without resources and protection. Jesus has harsh words for those who exploit the vulnerability of widows (Mark 12:40 and parallels).
- We don't know whether Tabitha was wealthy or living in poverty as many other widows were. What we do know is that she was generous with whatever she had, **‘devoted to good works and acts of charity’** (v.36). When Peter arrives, Tabitha's community show him that this generosity was deeply practical. They bring out ‘tunics and other clothing’ that Tabitha had made (v.39).
- Invite those present to reflect on whether they know where the clothes they are wearing were made and who made them. In modern society, fast fashion separates us from those who manufacture what we wear. Our cheap clothing invariably comes at a cost to those making it and to the climate.
- Now ask those gathered whether they have ever been given something sewn, knitted or crafted just for them. How did that feel? For Tabitha's community the clothes she made were necessities of life but they were also - just like the handmade gifts we may receive - expressions of her love. We can imagine Tabitha's friends and neighbours invited Peter to touch the fabrics and trace the patterns as they told him of the woman they mourned. As we listen to this passage we're witnesses to this community remembering and grieving Tabitha. The widows' tears testify to a life lived in the service of others.
- The theologian Willie James Jennings points to God's promises that he will protect and watch over widows (see Psalms 68:5 and 146:9, for example). For Jennings, Tabitha's resurrection is a sign from God both of the glory of a life of generous service and of God's ongoing commitment to a group of women often marginalised in their society. Jennings writes of Tabitha: ‘This woman matters, and the work she does for widows matters to God. It matters so much that God will not allow death the last word. ... Tabitha is an activist who lives again in resurrection power.’ (*Acts: A Theological Commentary*, 2017). Tabitha has more to do, and more hope and joy and love to offer and to receive within her community.

- This Christian Aid Week, we hear from Aurelia, a member of the Indigenous community in Guatemala. Aurelia dedicates herself not only to improving the life of her immediate family but also to sharing her training with her whole community. Aurelia's father Ricardo told Christian Aid: **'The best thing Aurelia does is share knowledge with women in the community - she doesn't keep it to herself'**. Aurelia says: **'I really give my life to my neighbours.'**
- Like Tabitha and Aurelia, we're called by God to be activists, to serve others and to share generously what we have. Tabitha's resurrection is a gift and a sign not just to the widows who mourned their loss but also to us through the words of scripture. That resurrection power is one we can all share in as we put our love for our neighbours, both those close at home and around the world, into action.

John 10:22-30

'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.'

This is the ultimate hope to which we are called: the promise of eternal life through the love of God. How are we to live here and now in response to this promise?

- Today, when a person is referred to as a 'sheep', it's usually intended as an insult. We've even coined the term 'sheeple' to refer to a group who fall in line and follow unthinkingly. But when we look at the relationship between the 'sheep' and their 'shepherd' in John chapter 10 we see something very different. The 'good shepherd' in this passage loves the sheep so much that he puts their very lives before his own. The shepherd's mission is not to acquire a docile following but to care for the sheep. To follow the shepherd is not to obey mindlessly but to be cared about, safeguarded from harm, and to recognise and respond to that love with trust.
- Again, if we look earlier in chapter 10 we see what it is that the 'good shepherd' seeks for the sheep: **'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly'** (v.10). This verse is key to Christian Aid's work. Abundant life is a gift that all should enjoy, not at some future time but here and now. Christian Aid seeks to ensure that all people can live a full life, free from poverty. We believe that the injustice of poverty can and must end, and that as followers of Jesus we're called to work towards that goal.
- In this reading, Jesus says: **'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.'** There are many things that can drown out Jesus' voice as he speaks to us and guides us. Perhaps we're too busy to stop what we're doing and listen. Perhaps the noise of the conflict and division we see in our world is drowning out hope or possibility. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of today's global challenges. Or maybe we *are* listening but the message that we hear is difficult to accept? Are we being challenged by Jesus to change who we are and what we're doing?
- One element of this chapter that stands out in our current context is Jesus' emphasis on abundance, care and the shepherd's enduring faithfulness. The good shepherd will never desert the sheep and **'No one will snatch them out of my hand'**. This is a powerful promise. How might this help us to respond to voices around us that tell us that scarcity and precarity are inevitable? Voices that tell us to look after our own interests or risk losing out? Or those that teach us to mistrust one another? As followers of Jesus, how can we live out this promise of unending love and abundant life?

Sunday after Christian Aid Week - 18 May

Acts 11:1-18

'The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us.'

Who belongs? In this reading Peter and the early Christian community grapple with the question of who can and who cannot be included. Where do the boundaries of this new community lie? What distinctions are important in shaping a community that follows Jesus?

- Already in Acts 10 Peter has wrestled with the boundary-crossing that God has required of him as he comes to realise that **'God shows no partiality'** in who can receive the Holy Spirit (vv. 34 and 47). Peter is called to associate with, relate to, baptise, love and care for all believers. The Spirit tells him **'not to make a distinction'** between outsiders and insiders in this new and growing fellowship of disciples. What a hopeful message! All people are welcome, included, valued.
- Peter's experience provides us with an opportunity to think about distinctions that we still find ourselves making today in our churches and communities. Despite God's call to diversity-in-unity (eg Ephesians 4) we still draw lines between those who are 'in' and those who are 'out', those whose voices are listened to and those who are silenced or ignored.
- We may firmly believe that our churches are welcoming to all. Nonetheless, it can be helpful to recognise that welcoming and boundary-crossing is an *ongoing* task. The self-examination of the Christian community doesn't end in the early church. We need to keep considering what we're doing to remain faithful to the Spirit's message of inclusion.
- The boundaries that separate supposed 'insiders' from 'outsiders' are drawn on a global scale too. When it comes to making economic policy and climate negotiations, whose voices are heard and who is silenced or ignored?
- Too often it's those living in poverty and feeling the effects of the climate crisis who are marginalised.
- Guatemala is among the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of the impact of rising temperatures. The country produces 0.05% of global carbon emissions currently but faces drought, hundreds of forest fires, and storms.
- Farmers are under pressure to sell their land to industrial developers whose practices worsen the environmental crisis. In discussions of political and economic action to tackle these issues it's those most affected by the crisis who are excluded.



Aurelia and her mother carry water to their home.

- This is the kind of partiality that we see expressed in the Letter of James: 'For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here in a good place, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?' (2:2-4). Who today is given the 'good place' to sit and told to stand watching from the sidelines?
- Are we doing enough as Christian communities to challenge this exclusion? Are we living out our boundary-crossing mission and challenging the structures that treat some people and some countries as 'outsiders'?



Aurelia with some of her grandchildren.

- If you want to find out more about how Christian Aid can help your church take action to address exclusion of people living in poverty, check out our Restore campaign at caid.org.uk/Restore

John 13:31-35

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'

Jesus' 'new commandment' to the disciples is both simple and radical: love one another, just as we are loved by God.

- Jesus loves the disciples beyond imagination. He loves them and us and all creation enough to lay down his life (v. 36). He loves us enough to forgive us when we get things wrong repeatedly (Matthew 18: 22). He loves us with a love that is 'everlasting', 'rich in mercy', 'abounding' and 'steadfast'.* And as followers of Jesus we're called to share in and imitate this love. This is how people will know who we are (v. 35). Our identity as disciples is rooted in acts of love.
- Who is included in the scope of this command to love? Jesus shows us just how expansive this command is through his actions and the people he chooses to spend time with. We are to love our neighbour and all the world is our neighbour. We are to love those who wrong us. We are to love those the world rejects. We are to love those who trouble us with questions and challenge us.
- How do we show our love? Jesus shows his love in words and actions that are directed towards the good of others, even to the point of giving up his life. If we are to imitate this love and be known as Jesus' disciples, then we must speak up and stand with those who need our support.
- Aurelia told Christian Aid that she **'really gives her life to her neighbours'**, sharing what she learns with them so that they can find new ways to farm and to thrive. How will each of us follow Aurelia's example of generous and loving service to others this Christian Aid Week?

*See, for example, Jeremiah 31, Psalms 86 and 136, Ephesians 2.

For use at any time

Joel 1:17-20

‘Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.’

- Communities around the world are feeling the impact of the climate crisis. People on the lowest incomes are the most likely to be directly dependent on farming and natural resources for their day-to-day subsistence. That’s true for many Indigenous people in Guatemala.



Aurelia holds a dead cacao pod, usually a drought-resistant crop.

For farmers like Aurelia and Amelia, dying crops mean food stops. When Amelia can’t grow a range of fruits and vegetables due to extreme temperatures and drought, her children miss out on the vital nutrients they need to thrive. **‘My plantations have been dying due to lack of water,’** Amelia told Christian Aid, **‘there is no food for my kids’.**

- Access to water is a huge challenge for Aurelia and Amelia’s communities. Sources close to them have dried up or become polluted. Aurelia now walks for around four hours a day to make two trips to collect water. Aurelia is clear about the threats facing her and her neighbours: **‘Water is life,’** she says. **‘As the plants are dying, the next thing that will die is us.’**
- The prophet Joel offers a powerful account of ecological disaster. Farmers lament as their harvests fail: **‘The seed shrivels ... the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness’** (vv.17 and 20). And with the death of the food crops ‘joy withers away among the people’ (v.13).
- Joel includes the voices of nature itself in the prophecy. We’re told that **‘The ground mourns’** (v. 10) and we hear that the **‘animals groan’** and the **‘wild animals cry’** to God (vv. 18 and 20). The earth speaks about the damage that’s being done to it.
- Joel’s response to this devastation is to place the responsibility on humanity. We’re the ones who grieve but we’re also the ones who must join our voices to those of the land and animals and ‘cry out’ in prayer. For humans, however, there is an additional task that is not required of the rest of creation: repentance. In the next chapter Joel speaks of the need for people to ‘return’ to God (2:12-13).
- Only through this repentance and return do new possibilities open up that shape the whole of creation’s future. Only then can the soil that was in mourning be told that there’s nothing to fear and the animals that cried out be reassured (2:21-22).
- Joel’s prophecy gives us words to express our own grief and sorrow over the impact of human actions on the natural world. It can be very hard to feel hopeful in the face of the climate crisis. But just as Aurelia and Amelia haven’t given up hope for their communities, we cannot allow ourselves to be overcome by despair. As Joel shows us, we need to take up the challenge, repent of our part in the climate crisis and, with God’s help, seek the restoration and healing of creation.

Mark 6:30-44

‘They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat!”’

Hope can be hard work. It’s more than ‘positive thinking’. Hope means taking a realistic view of our challenges and struggles and continuing to believe in the possibility of a better future.

- We can see just how demanding hope is by studying the words of prophets like Joel (see above) and Micah. Micah describes his situation as like someone who is hungry and goes to pick fruit but finds the trees bare. He’s looking for peace, faithfulness, and justice and instead finds violence and corruption: **‘Everyone lies in wait to shed blood ... the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes’** (Micah 7:2-3). Yet still this prophet says: **‘I watch in hope for the Lord ... my God will hear me’** (v.7). Micah believes in a God who is just and compassionate, who **‘delights to show mercy’** (v.18). His faith in God sustains him. And so, he hopes. He believes. He persists. When everything around him appears as bad as it can get, he holds on.
- In our reading from Mark’s Gospel the disciples have just returned from travelling. We hear earlier in chapter 6 that Jesus sent them out to share his message, telling his followers to take nothing with them **‘no bread, no bag, no money’** (v.8). The disciples have been hard at work and are perhaps feeling stretched to their limit. They’ve no doubt enjoyed hospitality and welcome in some places but have encountered hostility in others. When they return and tell Jesus what they have been doing, he suggests that they need to be somewhere away from other people so that they can ‘rest a while’.
- But what happens then? A crowd gathers and grows, wanting more from Jesus and those with him. Imagine yourself at the end of a long period of work and effort. Tired, footsore, longing for peace and quiet. Perhaps you can sympathise with the disciples who, as the evening comes, suggest that maybe the crowd would like to go home - or anywhere else - now?
- To the disciples it must have seemed like Jesus was ignoring all the practicalities of the situation. Not only would he not allow them some peace, when they make the sensible suggestion that everyone should leave to find something to eat, Jesus responds: **‘You give them something to eat’**. It’s impossible! As the disciples explain, to feed that number of people would cost 200 denarii or **‘more than half a year’s wages’** (6: 37, NIV). They ask incredulously: Are we going to spend that kind of money on bread?. To the disciples it is self-evident that this problem is simply too big for them - or anyone - to solve.
- In the world today, more than 700 million people are facing hunger and many more are grappling with food insecurity.* In Guatemala, more than 40% of children experience malnutrition that affects their development. It seems like these problems are too big to solve.

*These figures come from the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation. Hunger means that those people are undernourished - they do not have a sufficient amount and variety of food to eat to get the nourishment their bodies need. Food insecurity means that people do not have reliable access to a diversity of nourishing foods, enabling them to enjoy a healthy diet.

- But what does our reading show us? Firstly that the disciples got it wrong when they assumed that Jesus was proposing the impossible task of buying enough bread for all those people. Instead, Jesus asks them to find out what they and the crowd already have between them. Then they share what they have. Miraculously it's not simply enough but *more* than enough. 'And all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets [leftover] of broken pieces and of the fish.' (vv.42-43)
- The biblical commentator Warren Carter suggests: 'Jesus' powerful action in feeding this crowd with abundant food anticipates in the present God's eschatological purposes of justice in which food will be abundant and food insecurity no longer a daily struggle for many' (*Mark: Wisdom Commentary*, 2019). As we see across Jesus' ministry, those 'eschatological purposes' break through into the here and now. And Jesus challenges his followers to join the work of the kingdom that breaks into our day-to-day lives.
- In our story from Mark, the disciples don't let their doubts stop them from acting. When Jesus asks them to go and find out how much bread there is among the crowd, they go. The means to feed the crowd does not come from nowhere but grows from what they already have. Likewise in our lives, Jesus takes what we have and turns it into more than we're able to foresee or imagine.
- Like Micah, and like the disciples in Mark, we may find it hard to hold on to hope. When we do, we can call on the God of hope. Then what little we have will be turned into an abundance **'so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'** (Romans 15: 13).
- Farmers like Aurelia and Amelia are showing us the way. Their abounding hope for a better future for their communities drives them to learn and seek new solutions to the challenges they face. Will we follow in their footsteps and turn our hope into action for change?



Christian Aid's 80th year

THE UNSTOPPABLE POWER OF HOPE

In 2025 Christian Aid marks 80 years of fighting poverty and injustice. Today we remain united in love and hope with churches and Christians around the world, supporting millions of people of all faiths and none. Because we believe in the unstoppable power of hope.

Thank you for being part of our global community of supporters, churches, fundraisers, activists and partners. We couldn't deliver our groundbreaking work without you and the hope, love and determination you bring to all we do together.

Christian Aid Week is fantastic opportunity for churches and communities to come together, but our work together doesn't end there. Please join us throughout 2025 and beyond in our mission to ensure that everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

If you and your church would like to mark our 80th year, we have a range of resources to help you including:

- Specially written prayers and a liturgy of recommitment.
- Opportunities to book a Christian Aid speaker for an 80th anniversary talk.
- Videos to share in your church that explore how putting faith into action makes a difference.
- Exhibitions and events in cathedrals and churches across the country.
- Our 80th anniversary services at St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, on 17 May and at Westminster Abbey, London, on 12 June. All are welcome to join us for these events. Please register online for a place.

Find out more about these resources and events at caid.org.uk/80Years and at caid.org.uk/Church



Aurelia with dried plantains made using a dehydrator provided by Christian Aid's partner, Congcoop.

