

N.B. This talk has been written with the intention that 'The Parable of the Mustard Seed' has been read prior to the talk. It would also be highly beneficial to have also shown the CAW film beforehand too, as some slight edits will need to be made if you're unable to.

2 Good morning! I'm _____ and I'm part of the Christian Aid Ireland team. It is such a pleasure to be here to worship God together this morning. I am so grateful for the opportunity to share with you about the work of Christian Aid and to thank you for your ongoing support through Christian Aid Week and beyond.

At Christian Aid, we believe that our global partnership with local organisations is key to supporting and sustaining lasting change, because partners hold deep knowledge of local contexts, challenges and communities. And your generous giving allows Christian Aid to invest in these projects and programmes. But I wonder have we grown too used to hearing about poverty and injustice? Not because we don't care, but because we don't know what to do about it.

The problems feel too big. The change feels too slow (if it even happens at all). And so, quietly and resignedly, we begin to expect less.

But what if we've misunderstood how change actually happens?

3 Kenya is a lower middle-income country that has seen rapid economic growth over recent years. Despite this, development challenges such as lack of access to education, underinvestment in infrastructure and the effects of the climate crisis remain. Severe droughts are often followed by heavy rain and powerful floods that devastate crops. This disruption to the nation's food supply is a key factor in the rising prices of groceries, the consequences of which means families are simply not getting the nutrition they need. It's common for millions of people to only have one meal a day, leading to malnutrition, which causes the permanent stunting of both physical and mental development.

4 Urbanisation has resulted in semi-permanent 'informal settlements' in cities like Nairobi, where over 60% of the population live in densely packed, simply built shelters made from steel sheets or concrete. These settlements are without even the most basic services, such as a functioning sewage system or electricity, and residents have limited access to education and employment opportunities. The pressure and stress living like this can make home lives turbulent and often violent, frequently deadly for women.

Technical language in the development world would refer to the cumulation of these stressors as 'multidimensional poverty'. But what that really means for the million people who live in just one of these informal settlements within Nairobi alone is that life is unbelievable hard and, at times, hopeless.

But hope is growing in one of Kenya's biggest informal settlements, called Dagoretti.

5 The urban farming project (which you saw in the film earlier), delivered by our trusted partner, Beacon of Hope, offers the residents of Dagoretti the opportunity to grow nutritious food to eat and sell. By providing small urban allotment plots, kale, cabbage and tomato seeds, agricultural training and tools, families can ensure their children are eating nutritious meals every day and earn a regular income through the sale of their surplus harvest. Parents who once lived day to day, making impossible choices on how to meet their children's needs, are now able to buy everyday essentials and save for a brighter future.

One such parent is Fridah.

6 Fridah Moraa lives with her 13-year-old twin sons, Eliud and Abuid, her daughter and 4-year-old grandson, Quillan. The family lives in rented corrugated metal shelters, share toilet facilities with other families around them and have no running water. In these conditions, keeping her family healthy and safe from disease is a constant battle for Fridah, and one she must now face alone. Because, in February 2025, a tragic accident claimed the life of her husband, and she feels his absence deeply – especially in such a deeply patriarchal society as is found in Kenya.

However, Fridah deep Christian faith, coupled with her involvement with Beacon of Hope's urban farming project, has empowered to her to face such heartbreaking loss and daily struggles with hope and resilience.

7 She told us that when she first joined the urban farming training sessions that she was confused by their purpose: But her teacher James (who is also featured in our film), quickly helped her to understand the unexpected nature of urban farming and how different it is from a traditional approach to rural farming. She explains: 'At first, I didn't understand. I was wondering, where can someone farm here in Nairobi. I discovered I could sow here – right where I stand! I learned that here in Nairobi, you can farm where you live even if you don't have land.'

8 Beacon of Hope are well aware of the scarcity of open land in Nairobi and so they are teaching participants how to farm using incredibly innovative techniques. For example, 'hydroponics' allow vegetables to be grown directly on pumice stones instead of soil, requiring less land and water than if they were to be grown conventionally in a farmers' field. This allows farmers to grow more crops within limited spaces, which is very important in densely populated areas like Dagoretti, which is home to over 430,000 people. Other land-saving techniques taught include using 'stacked troughs' with soil and manure, each able to hold between 100 and 120 crops, as well as how to grow crops in upright sack gardens. Additionally, the stacked tray approach helps to conserve water by minimizing water evaporation.

Having been taught these farming techniques and others, such as pest management, compost production and seed cultivation, Fridah went on to learn about money

management and marketing – important skills required to sustain a healthy business. Beacon of Hope’s urban farming project has provided Fridah with the vital boost of support that she needed to make a better future for her family, and their lives have been transformed by a small plot of land, some seeds and a mother’s resourcefulness.

She says: ‘Urban farming has changed my life.’

9 And it has changed the life of her family too. When her twins aren’t playing football, they carry precious water from outside their home, where men sell it in containers from a cart, to water their plot. The boys can see how important the farm is to their family and what it means to their mum as a reliable source of income, financial independence, and pride.

Fridah says, ‘I’m proud to eat what I’ve produced. This is my own work. I know how it was grown. I know how to grow without chemicals. That is what makes me happy.’

For now, the pressure for Fridah to provide food and security for her family has eased, thanks to her commitment to urban farming, and she’s now known by her neighbours as ‘the vegetable lady’!

The abundance that has come into Fridah’s life through this project mirrors the abundance that Jesus is describing when he tells the parable of the mustard seed in the gospels.

He often uses parables to draw his listeners in to awaken a new understanding in them, to stimulate their conscience, and ultimately move them to action. Jesus’ parables are prophetic instruments, used to get God’s people to stop, reconsider their way of viewing reality, and change their behaviour. So when I first heard James referring to the parable of the mustard seed in the film, it really got me thinking about the reasons why Christian Aid shares stories.

10 Jesus shares parables that are meant to invite people into the surprising nature of God’s Kingdom as revealed through him – they challenged people’s views about how the Kingdom of God would show up. The mustard seed parable is about the upside-down value system of the Kingdom. It teaches listeners that they have to reshape their ideas about wealth and social status and the invitation of God’s Kingdom and Jesus speaks about it in the language of his hearer’s daily lives.

In Galilee, in AD30, you and your family live on land that you don’t own. You’re governed by a compromised leader who doesn’t represent your interests, and you have Roman militarisation everywhere. Taxes are heavy, people are going into debt, people are being sold into slavery. Life is unbelievably hard. Not unlike Kenya. Not unlike many regions of the world in which Christian Aid are present.

If these were our circumstances, of course our desire would be for an epic overruling by the promised Messiah. Rolling in, battle ready to destroy the occupiers and

collaborators in the blink of an eye. That's what Jesus' audience wanted then. It's how many of us feel today about poverty and injustice and inequality and hate. We want it to just instantly end. We've been wanting that for decades.

11 Like the growth of the mustard seed, the growth of the Kingdom of God will be almost unannounced. Nevertheless, eventually, like the tree that becomes larger than all the others in the garden, it will fulfil God's purposes when full grown. Such an apparently insignificant sowing will produce a world-wide people of God. This parable sharply challenged the expectation of Jesus' disciples. I hope that Fridah's story will help to overturn your frustration, your disillusionment with the how the world is right now.

Change is possible.

What's happening in Nairobi can happen in any city in the world. What's happening in Fridah's life can happen in the lives of millions of other women who are waking up fearful and hungry every single day.

With governments in turmoil in 2026, we aren't going to see epic global change. And that's ok because that's not what Jesus told us to look out for. By despairing at the whole wide world, we neglect to see the impact that a little spinach seed, planted in some pumice stone and grown in a discarded yoghurt pot in a small plot of red clay earth in the back of a house built from sheet metal and concrete bricks.

12 God's kingdom is showing up in Fridah's life through the work of our faith partners in Beacon of Hope. They live kingdom values as people, they build kingdom values through their projects – their love, their diligence, their hope, and in turn, the Kingdom is coming in Dagoretti and our hope is that everyone in that informal settlement will 'nest under its shade'.

The mustard seed parable is about this contrast of small to great – of the unannounced change that the Kingdom will gradually bring to the world. And we're invited to be part of that growth which will help to build a fairer world for everyone. This special week in May, helps fund programmes and projects, like Fridah's urban farming, that are offering practical solutions to communities in crisis. Christian Aid Week is one week to support families to end their hunger and build a life beyond poverty. It's also an opportunity to put our faith in small acts what can bring about incredible transformation.

13 *final slide offers opportunities to engage with CAW.

*close in prayer