

Sunday 13th May 2018
Easter 7 (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: Acts 1.15-17,21-end

NT: I John 5.9-13

G: John 17.6-19

Stand together. Not words of Jesus recorded in the gospels as he ascended to the Father, his mission to redeem all humanity complete. But surely words that echo his message to his followers.

Stand together for dignity, equality and justice.

This is the theme for Christian Aid week which begins today. Stand together. This Eastertide we have all preached on the various gospel images which show that we cannot follow Christ in isolation.

We are the sheep of his flock, the members of his body, the Church, branches of the vine which feeds and sustains us in all we do.

We believe in a relational God, the Holy Trinity, three persons in one God. Love needs to give and so love needs a recipient. Love cannot exist in a vacuum, it must have something to love. If this is true for God, who is love, then so it is true for us, human beings made in the image of God. If we stand alone, we lose the power and the presence of love. We need to stand together.

Recently, we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King.

The Civil Rights movement in America began when Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to stand on the bus because all the 'coloured' seats were taken. Instead, she sat in a 'white' seat. The Civil Rights movement in America would have ended with Rosa Parks if others had not decided enough is enough and under the leadership of Martin Luther King, were determined to *Stand together for dignity, equality and justice.*

If you've seen the film, Selma, and if you haven't I recommend it, you will know that it concerns Martin Luther King's campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in

1965. There is a scene on a bridge when the white authorities confront the marchers, but the sheer number of those protesting confounds them. If we stand together, we have the power and presence of love.

Christian Aid this year wishes to draw our attention to an event we probably all have a vague recollection of, but which has largely slipped from our consciousness. Hurricane Matthew.

It was headline news at the time in September 2016 but the world's media has moved on. For the people of Haiti who lost everything they possessed, the devastation caused by the storm remains. When you live in abject poverty, it's not so easy to replace your belongings, your animals, your home. If you go the Christian Aid website, you will see the story of several Haitians. One is Jocelyne who was forced to live in mud with only a tarpaulin for shelter after the storm. Her new home which consists of metal, wood and tarpaulin is little better and leaves her exposed to the ravages of further storms and offers no protection against those who would wish to harm her. Or there is Marcelin and his family. They too lost everything and now live in an old concrete shower block. If you've ever been camping, those places aren't ideal for showering in, let alone living in especially when your only piece of furniture is a single bed. Both Jocelyne and Marcelin know another hurricane will simply kill them all. They had already survived the powerful earthquake of 2010 but now feel exposed and defeated in the wake of Hurricane Matthew.

But Christian Aid offers hope if we stand together. Their website also tells of Vilia's story. She too lost everything following the earthquake but through the work of Christian Aid she received a home built to withstand the powers of nature to which Haiti is so exposed. During Hurricane Matthew, she was able to shelter some 50 people, family members and neighbours so that they saw out the storm in safety in her house.

Any financial contributions that we make to Christian Aid this week will help to build new homes for people such as Jocelyne and Marcelin and their families so that they can be protected from future disasters.

At this time of year, the Church remembers Jesus' apostles gathered together praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus ascended to his Father, he did not leave us orphans, as the hymn says, but sent his Spirit, as he promised, to be our guide in this life, to be our source of strength, to unite us in his love.

Like any good team, together we are much stronger than the sum of our parts, we are able to achieve so much more, to provide a witness to the gospel that cannot be ignored, to show the world that the love of God is alive and at work today and tomorrow as it always has been. If I give £10 today that might buy a hod full of bricks. If everybody gives £10 that buys whole houses and a future for people who feel lost in despair.

Christ calls us to stand together, not just for Christian Aid, but always. He calls us to be sheep of his flock, members of his body, the Church, branches of his vine so that together we bear much fruit, fruit that will last and benefit all our brothers and sisters. We cannot be a Christian in isolation because by definition as a Christian we belong to Christ and therefore to each other, to all humanity. If we all answer Jesus' call to follow him, if we all make our own contribution, if we *Stand together for dignity, equality and justice*, then the kingdom of God will be among us.

Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose