

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

THE GLORY OF THE GARDEN

Gideon Heugh reflects on how lockdown has helped bring us closer to creation, and how we now have the opportunity to ensure it is cared for as it should be.

'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.' (Genesis 1:31a)

One of the more positive stories to emerge from many months of bad stories is how lockdown has brought so many people closer to nature. Forced from our normal rhythms, we have had the opportunity to attune ourselves to the rhythms of creation.

The arrival of the migrant birds. The first stems poking out from the soil. The trees returning to leaf. The flowering of the snowdrops, then the daffodils, the bluebells, the primroses, the camelias, the magnolias and now, thrillingly, the roses.

How wondrous is our God? How beautiful is the world he has made?

It is no coincidence that Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener when she went looking for his body (John 20:15). Who else would have greener fingers than our Lord?

A new world

Now that the lockdown is beginning to ease, and some semblance of normality starts to creep back into life, I hope we don't forget the time we were brought closer to creation.

More than that, I hope we use it as an opportunity to renew our efforts to push back against the destruction of creation that has so stained these last few decades.

By praying and working together as the church we can create a better future – one in which creation is treasured as highly as it should be. To that end, we have recently launched our *Reboot Campaign* – in which we are calling on the UK government to build back better.

As we eventually emerge from this lockdown into a new world, we have a rare opportunity to reshape society into one that is fairer and more sustainable. Together, we can ensure that this opportunity isn't wasted.

PLEASE PRAY

Creator God,

Thank you for the gift that is your world. May we never take it for granted. May we treat creation with the love, care and respect that such an astonishing gift deserves. We pray for the success of the *Reboot Campaign*, and for your wisdom upon all those working to build a better society in the wake of this pandemic.

In Jesus' name, amen.

If you would like to add your voice to the *Reboot Campaign*, you can do so at
www.tearfund.org/action

A NOTE FROM...

'This pandemic has highlighted the brokenness of our old system. This is a moment to reimagine how our world works, and raise our voices together to create change. We're uniting prayer and action out of our love for creation and our global neighbours – will you join us?'

Ruth Valerio, Tearfund's Global Advocacy and Influencing Director

CRYING OUT FOR PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN AFTER MORE VIOLENT ATTACKS

South Sudan is a nation that's known little peace in its nine-year lifetime. A recent attack on in the northeast of the country left hundreds of people dead in Jonglei state, including three aid workers – further evidence that peace is not here yet.

But we won't stop praying. We won't stop going to the hungry and the vulnerable. It's what Jesus calls us to do.

Tearfund's team in the country sees first-hand the consequences of this unrest, which forces people away from their homes and pushes them into extreme poverty. That's why we won't stop our feeding centres for malnourished children, pregnant and new mothers, or our food distributions and our water and sanitation work.

There have been glimmers of hope in the peace process, most recently on 22 February. Rival leaders President Salva Kiir and former opposition leader Riek Machar agreed to form a new government. It comes after six years of conflict and fighting, where 400,000 people have been killed and many more displaced.

Since then South Sudan has been making small steps towards peace and stability. But some militant leaders didn't agree to the peace deal, and clashes continue.

Cattle conflict

Violence has been on the rise since March, with community conflicts centering around cattle raiding and retribution for previous attacks. It's jeopardising efforts by humanitarian groups, such as Tearfund, in a region that has been hit by droughts, floods, locusts, and now the start of a potentially large-scale coronavirus outbreak.

In the Jonglei region, where May's attack took place, Tearfund has had to temporarily relocate its offices. But we continue to provide life-saving support at our feeding centres where it is possible.

'We are deeply saddened by the recent deaths and conflicts in the country,' says Anthony Rama, Tearfund Country Director in South Sudan. 'Fighting between communities disrupts the life-saving work we do for people who are already desperate. All parties and communities must step up efforts at a local and national level to end this cycle of violence and deliver sustainable peace for South Sudan.'

Coronavirus challenges

The coronavirus pandemic is only adding fuel to the many challenges that South Sudan is facing. At the time of writing, there are 1604 confirmed cases and 19 deaths reported. With a struggling health system it becomes almost impossible to provide the most-needed medical care. The country is just not equipped to handle this new crisis.

Even though the number of cases is rapidly increasing, the government has decided to ease restrictions so that people can try to make a living. The hope is this will help to revive the economy. But with the closure of borders prices have rocketed, making it very difficult for families.

Before the coronavirus, more than half of the population (6.5 million people) were at risk of hunger. And as well as coronavirus, plagues of locusts are currently invading parts of east Africa, and severe flooding in 2019 saw many farmers lose their homes, crops and cattle. It means even more people will need food aid and humanitarian support. Please join us in praying for lasting peace in South Sudan.

PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for the end of the cycle of violence and poverty in South Sudan.
- Ask God to protect our staff, partners and the communities we serve.
- Pray for the end of the coronavirus outbreak and for an effective response.

FEAR: FIGHT, FLIGHT, FURY... AND FAITH

'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chronicles 7:14)

It's time to bow before our God.

On an overwhelming scale, in the midst of a global pandemic, humanity is confronting an uncomfortable truth. We are not in control of so many things. Viruses. Natural disasters. Other people's behaviour. Our minds and our media are full of questions we can't possibly know the answer to.

'How will we eat? Where will it end? How will I face the death of my family member? The death of my job? The death of my way of living?'

Fear

Fear is not designed for a sustained response. It's an instinct to protect us from immediate danger. Fight or flight. That's perfect if you're dealing with an instant issue – it might even save your life, but living in an ongoing atmosphere of fear means that the fight becomes with our governments... or our neighbours, and flight turns into anxiety and despair. And as we lose our fingernail grip on the control we thought we had on the world, fury sets in. Frustration. Finger-pointing. Hate.

Hindsight is 20/20 – but 2020 doesn't yet have the privilege of that. So what can we do? When our hearts are breaking at the loss and injustice we see all around us?

Faith

We kneel before our God, who has the power to heal our land. We fall on our knees before him in humility. We call on his great love – the antithesis of fear.

And then we take control of what we do have in our hands: our ability to keep working to empower people around the world to step out of poverty – material and spiritual. Our voices raised in righteous anger to speak out against injustice – toward our world and our fellow man (or woman).

Fighting poverty

It's what's at the heart of our work in many areas as we set up church and community transformation through things like self-help groups. In many environments conflict, climate change, disease and natural disaster – all things which are largely outside of the control of the people affected – result in poverty.

Without their basic needs fulfilled, it's nearly impossible for people to fulfil their God-given potential. Giving them the training, means and tools to transform their own communities and lives places power into the hands of individuals and communities. This feeds not only their families' bellies, but their hearts and minds – understanding that they can have hope for the future. And their children. And their children. Birthing a lasting change that has the power to transform generations.

We're being part of the stories of change for people like Wogasso in Ethiopia. He has gone from feeling helpless, hopeless and broken to having restored relationships with his family, lifting himself and them out of poverty and facing a future with friends and with hope. 'I have a bright future with God,' he declares.

Freedom

It's what is at the heart of our campaigning work. Though sometimes the issues may seem so deeply ingrained that they are beyond our control, we do not stay silent. We speak up for people and our planet. For all of creation. We love – with patience, kindness, forgiveness and hope. We live our faith, following Jesus where the need is greatest, standing up against injustice through our actions and not just with our words.

For what are our words without love? And what is our love without action?

We follow the one who spoke up for the widow and the orphan. The downtrodden. The unheard.

'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6:8)

What is required of us is clear. The rest is his. Approaching him with humility we acknowledge this. He is the one who is able to intervene in the places where we cannot. God is only on lockdown if we don't call on him to move. He gave us the right to choose him.

Let us look up. Let us call on his hand to move – surely his arm is not too weak to save, nor his ear to deaf to hear. (Isaiah 59:1)

The whole Bible is filled with stories of people whose faith defied the circumstances around them. Jericho's walls. The expanse of seemingly impassable water straight ahead of a fleeing nation. A barren woman and an aged man holding onto the promise that their seed would produce many nations. They saw their problems. And they looked to their God.

We walk by faith and not by sight.

During this time, as we continue to work around the world, we have been so encouraged by the faith of many of those we work with and for. We would love to share with you these words from Jennipher Sakala, who leads Tearfund's work in southern and east Africa. We pray that they will bless you and feed your faith.

“Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.” Those were the words of our Lord Jesus Christ at the time of his excruciating death on the cross. We share with you... here from southern and east Africa, a message of hope and encouragement during this very difficult time. We... are very encouraged by your resilience, by your continued support and your hard work towards helping out other countries.’

PLEASE PRAY

- Thank God for his grace in sending us his son. Though our world is so broken, he never leaves us or gives up on us. Ask him to forgive us where we have fallen short.
- Praise God that he is mighty to save. Thank him that we approach him knowing that his arm is not too short, nor his ear too deaf to hear our cries. Cry out for our world – and all creation in it.
- Pray that as we follow Jesus, we will have his eyes to see the greatest needs of those around us and that we, as the church, will serve one another with great love.

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

 Today (12 June) is the World Day Against Child Labour. Globally, there are an estimated 152 million children in child labour – 72 million carrying out dangerous work. There are concerns that lockdown has forced even more children into work. Pray for an end to child labour. And pray for every child to have the opportunity to attend school and flourish.

 Violence by armed groups in Niger and Mali have forced thousands to flee their homes to seek refuge. There are now 35,000 Malian refugees and internally displaced people in western Niger. Lift up women and children who are especially vulnerable during these attacks. Pray for provision for people living in refugee camps, and pray for lasting peace.

 Thank God for the churches we work with around the world who are adapting and supporting their communities through lockdown. In challenging circumstances they are providing practical, spiritual and emotional help to people in poverty. Pray for wisdom, energy and strength for their leaders. And pray for the work Tearfund is doing to resource and equip these churches.