**Christian Aid Sermon – Covid-20** (I apologise for your lack of pictures)

Did the images in Psalm 31 bring vivid images into your mind? Did they make sense to you? If like me you holiday in places like Wales or Scotland, it is easy to see rocks and fortresses as powerful metaphors to describe the protection God provides.

Here is **Caernarfon Castle.** Can you see why it is such a good place of safety? It is surrounded by a double curtain wall, which allows the residents to walk right round the castle in safety. Look at the windows or arrow slots? They were positioned in specially shaped towers to view attackers from all angles and to shoot at them effectively as well. So the castle not only offers protection but the opportunity to look at the world outside.

It is probable that David wrote Psalm 31 during a time when he was an outlaw, a fugitive, hunted down mercilessly by King Saul who saw him as a rival for the throne. For years, David and his loyal followers led a hand to mouth existence fleeing from one area to another, never sure whom to trust, except for the God who had chosen him to follow Saul onto the throne. This picture reminds me of the time he was hiding in a **cave** and Saul entered it to sleep. But it was a deep cave and it offered David safety.

Have you ever hung onto a **rock in the sea**? In all that churning water, it is the one solid thing. In an unstable situation, an uncharted time as we are in today, God at least is unchangeable, reliable, trustworthy. There are lots of hidden nets to entrap us: viruses we cannot see; false information; the temptation to break the rules. With God’s help and guidance, we may be able to avoid those nets and help others to avoid them too.

Psalm 31 was a favourite of the early Christians because they saw it as pointing to Jesus, who, in fact, used the words of verse 5 just before he died on the cross: “Lord, into your hands, I commit my spirit” – the prayer of each Jewish boy as he settled down to sleep. The awful images in verses 9-13 not only prefigure the crucifixion but speak to our current situation: that is, the effects of the Covid virus and the attitude of some people who are fearful of their fellow human beings and contemptuous of the efforts of the government to control the spread of the pandemic.

But David did not give up, and his words give us courage today: “Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord.” His trust was rewarded – He became the greatest king Israel ever had and from his family line came the Messiah, Jesus.

Jesus committed himself into God’s hand. The **hand** has become a vital symbol for us in 2020. It can spread a deadly disease but it can also offer healing and comfort. Jesus turned to the psalms for guidance, strength and courage. They teach us that God is concerned for our physical suffering, our bodily and mental well-being.

Britain may be a collection of islands, “this sceptur’d isle”, but no longer are we Shakespeare’s “fortress built by Nature for herself/Against infection and the hand of war” (Richard II:ii:1). We are part of a global family and this Christian Aid Week we are urged to be good global neighbours.

We have only to look back to the **Ebola outbreak in 2014** to be reminded of the deadly effects of touching then. Today, our clergy reach us through Zoom and the telephone and wisely obey instructions to maintain social distancing; but in 2014, the clergy in Sierra Leone went into the streets, at risk to themselves, to warn people and to provide safe and dignified funerals. Looking back, we see how inadequately placed people in the Third World are in the face of pandemics and other disasters.

In the past we have used our hands generously to help people in the Third World. We have cooked and planted, delivered envelopes, collected money and carried heavy loads of coins to the bank.

If Covid 19 gets a grip in Third World countries, the effects are likely be far worse than anything we endure.

Before Covid-19, there were more than **7,500 children under 5 dying** every day of preventable illnesses. This **baby**, just skin and bones, was one of the victims in Yemen.

Consider the risks in a **refugee camp** with few facilities and often lacking sanitation, adequate food or medical services. These are Syrian refugees, but there are refugees all over the world, at the last count, about 70 million displaced people.

Climate change has increased both **droughts and floods.** Do you remember how, in 2016, we helped **Morsheda** and her family in Bangladesh when rising water swept into her home and she woke just in time to save the baby? Now her home is safe on raised ground and she can raise chickens and grow some food.

Africa continues to suffer from **severe droughts.** Last year, we helped **Sister Judith** by rebuilding and equipping a community health centre so pregnant women could have a safe delivery. Before that, water was so scarce that it was even rationed for hand washing. How would such communities cope with Covid-19?

When people are being well cared for, we talk about them being “in good hands”. How much better to be in the **hands of God. [**The writer of Ecclesiastes in one of his rare references to God, says that the righteous and the wise are in the hand of God.] In Second Isaiah, God, speaking to the survivors of another catastrophe, the Exile, tells them, “I am the one who comforts you….I hid you in the shadow of my hand.” 52:12,16.

While we take comfort from that, let us also remember the words of St Teresa, “Christ has no body now but yours.  Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.”

Let us use our hands this Christian Aid Week to bless others, in whatever way is open to us. Amen. Rosemary Sumner (Christian Aid Organiser for Bromsgrove)