**Christian Aid Sermon – St. Godwald’s – 16th May 2021 Rosemary Sumner**

Have you ever experienced joy?

During the Pandemic, there has not been a lot of joy around, just a lot of anxiety and suffering. Yet some people have still found moments of joy, such as the NHS staff we saw on TV news clapping a recovered patient. Then there was the joy of Captain Tom that his efforts had helped others. Do you remember the stable in Teddington which was saved from closure so that disabled children could continue riding?

Joy can be ephemeral, like a burst balloon – great one moment, deflated the next. My greatest moments of joy have been when a pupil has succeeded in accomplishing something despite all the problems and setbacks with which he has been faced. On such occasions I have danced around the room, crying with happiness. That sort of joy lasts because I can follow their progress and see how their lives have changed for good.

During the loosening of lockdown, we have seen moments of joy as the elderly in care homes have been able to make contact with family members.

For many people around the world, there is little joy in their lives. In the Third World there is often great poverty and great hardship. Yet there can also be joy.

Over the years, the Bromsgrove churches have supported many Christian Aid projects.

. providing tools, seeds and mobile phones for farmers

. helping coffee and chocolate producers benefit from a co-operative

.supporting refugees

.providing solar lighting so children could see to do their homework

. giving monetary support to farming projects for Dalits in India (2)

.rebuilding a maternity clinic so mothers could give birth safely (2)

During the Pandemic we have come to value water on tap as never before.

Sister Judith washes a mother’s hands from a mug of precious water to teach them hygiene rules at the maternity cliic

But water can be both a blessing and a curse. Climate change has not only brought drought, but also flooding which destroys homes, livelihoods and people. In 2018, we raised money to help the people in Bangladesh whose homes were on islands of land in the river. We heard how Morsheda’s baby fell from his bed into the flood water but was rescued because she heard the splash. Their home and tiny farm is now on higher ground and providing safety and food.

African countries like Kenya and Uganda have endured both flooding and extreme drought. Last year, we heard how Rose had to walk for 6 hours a day just to fetch water because the earth dam near her home had dried up.

A clever idea to conserve the use of water was the use of Tippy water devices. A plastic liquid container was set up in such a way that a small amount of water could be tipped out at a time.

This year’s poster girl is Florence. She also had to spend many tiring hours fetching water, but now she is bubbling over with joy because Christian Aid helped her village to build an earth dam not far away. Always a positive person, Florence radiates joy and is continually singing God’s praises for the gift of clean, accessible water. Something we take for granted. Now she can grow vegetables and she also keeps bees and sells their honey in the nearby market. If you watch the service tonight on Zoom, you can see Florence and hear her thanks to all the people of the UK who made this possible for her.

In that passage we heard from John 15, Jesus spoke of his joy even as he faced an horrific death. This may seem extraordinary. He endured the cross because of the joy that would follow. “I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” 15:11 This suggests that joy does not deny sorrow or suffering but co-exists with them. So Jesus tries to encourage the disciples to abide in the love of God so that they may discover joy. He warns that they are going to need each other to get through the horrors ahead of them. It is their love for one another that will strengthen them. Love, friendship and joy will help them to remain faithful and bear lasting fruit.

It is love, friendship and joy which we hope is at the heart of Christian Aid. It should be our love for one another (however far away and alien they may seem to us), it is love which should inspire our generous giving. As we learn the stories of people like Rose, Florence and Morsheda, we should be motivated to make sacrificial acts of solidarity with them. It will be through our generous giving and sacrificial actions that we will bear lasting fruit and know real joy.

Like Jesus, we must look suffering in the face, see the pain of others and do something to bring joy into their lives. Lives can be transformed. The pain that Rose felt in her back, neck, legs and feet as she carried home heavy water containers can be replaced by joy just by building an earth dam.

So let us choose to enter into that struggle with people like Rose, and celebrate transformed communities with Florence, so that our joy may also be complete. Amen.