

# Bishop's Harvest Appeal 2018 Sermon Notes

## Harvesting a brighter future (year 2 of 3)

Selected readings: Isaiah 16: 8-11 and Mark 4: 26-32

Please refer to the appeal leaflet for information about the harvest appeal projects when using these notes. The leaflet can be found at [carlisle-diocese.org.uk](http://carlisle-diocese.org.uk) where you will also find an assembly for schools and guidance for churches on celebrating harvest with your local school. Sermon notes this year focus mainly on the project in Malawi being supported through Christian Aid. If you wish to focus on the Zululand USPG project in your service you may wish to use the sermon notes from 2017.

### Introduction

- In Cumbria, the harvest season normally comes around just after the schools have settled back in, following the long summer break. It is a time of Autumn colour, berries in the hedgerows, and school thanksgiving. It's a great rural celebration... but also a time to look out for those whose harvest has not been enough.
- 'Climate Change' is impacting farmers everywhere. Across the UK this year and in Cumbria we have experienced an extended dry spell and its consequences. In Cumbria livestock farmers have not been able to grow enough grass stock up silage for the winter, and are concerned about a winter feeding crisis (see news link [here](#) and [here](#)). As we acknowledge the impact of climate change locally (see news [item](#)) we have a greater insight into the severity of the effect of droughts and floods in Malawi, where survival is dependent on subsistence farming.
- The Bishop of Carlisle's Harvest appeal, for 2017, 2018 and 2019, will help communities in Malawi and Zululand address the issue of food insecurity for children and families. Your gifts will support a Christian Aid project in Malawi to enable farmers to work collectively to turn pigeon peas into profit. It will also fund a USPG project in Zululand, where rural churches will work with their communities to mobilise people into the development of community vegetable gardens.

### Feature story: Bertha

In Mwanza, where Bertha lives, it is very hot and the rainy season is increasingly unpredictable. In some years there is simply not enough rain. Before receiving support from Christian Aid, Bertha's pigeon pea harvest would only just produce enough to eat, and nothing to sell.

Bertha received 5kg of seed and pesticides and was trained in best farming practice by Christian Aid's partner, The Nandolo Association of Malawi. By selling through the local cooperative that Nandolo set up, Bertha and the other farmers can negotiate a better price. Previously if Bertha had produced enough pigeon peas to sell, she would have received about 85 mwk a kilo, and now through the cooperative she expects to receive 250 mwk a kilo. From her plot Bertha expects to reap 10 bags and receive about 125,000 mwk (approx. £125).



Photo: Bertha, her husband and children with pigeon pea plants

Pigeon peas are a great crop for Bertha; it is a cash crop that can be sold to provide family income, it is drought resistant, the leaves make the soil more fertile and the stems can be used for firewood.

Bertha's new income will ensure that she can pay for her children to go to secondary school, and she told us that she also plans to buy a bicycle for her family to use. Bertha asked us to thank people in the UK for their support, and that God may bless you as your continued support helps others too.

## Sermon notes

Written by Dare Holland from Coniston, a volunteer preacher and speaker for Christian Aid, who visited the Pigeon Pea Project in March 2018.

### Harvest Joy; a reality or a mirage?

Harvest is traditionally seen as a time of joy; the celebration of the reward of much labour, patience and care. Many examples can be found in song, music and literature e.g. Far from the madding crowd. We give thanks to God for the provision of our food and the goodness of the earth, especially in the hymns we sing.

But a good harvest depends upon the right weather at the right times, and climate change is making this unpredictable for many people. The farmers of Malawi can no longer rely on a good harvest of maize, the crop used for nsima, Malawian's staple porridge-like food. Some years bring floods that wash away the growing crops; other years bring drought and the crops wither and die without producing corn. Then their hopes are dashed and there is no joy at harvest time for there is no harvest. Their thoughts are more likely to reflect the passage from Isaiah 16.

Even in the towns and cities of Malawi, almost everyone has a plot of land on which to grow maize for their family; no farms are very big, even though more than 80% of the population is involved in subsistence farming and 85% live in rural settings. Many depend entirely on what they grow for food and as a source of income. When the crops fail there is little food in the shops and even less money with which to buy it. Failed harvests will mean hunger, children missing school, malnutrition and disease, and even starvation.

### The mustard seed

Sowing seeds and watching them grow can be a great experience. Can you remember growing mustard and cress on damp lint, or peas in a jam jar using blotting paper? Every gardener loves watching the process of germination and the growth of their favourite plants to maturity, be they flowers or vegetables. It is the thrill of something so small and dead looking being transformed into something of beauty and value. So Jesus spoke of a mustard seed, the smallest of all, growing to be a home for the birds.

Christian Aid has enabled seeds to be sown in areas of Malawi hit by climate change. Actual seeds in the form of pigeon peas and seeds of hope in people's lives being changed.

Pigeon peas are not a new crop to farmers in Malawi, usually grown to use as a relish to eat with nsima, but not to sell. The peas are nutritious and tasty when supplemented by vegetables. The plants send down deep roots that can withstand the floods, and keep feeding the plants in time of drought. Plants are not hungry for fertilisers and actually feed the soil with nitrogen. Now with help from Christian Aid's partner, The Nandolo Association of Malawi, farmers are growing pigeon peas as a cash crop, and so becoming less dependent on the unpredictable maize harvest.

Income is increased by selling in co-operatives, an integral part of the project and lives are really being changed. Animals such as goats and chickens diversify the agricultural base; more substantial new houses (some even having mains electricity) and enough money to buy school uniforms so children can go to school; all contribute to the hope of a better future as these particular seeds come to fruition.

### A new harvest

Beyond such concrete examples, people's pride in their achievements and the determination to do even better in the years to come all point to renewed harvest joy in the future.

It is amazing to see what a wonderful harvest can be produced by a small input; but then Jesus also told us that faith as small as a mustard seed could be enough to move mountains (Matthew 17:20), so we should not be too surprised at what is being achieved by those involved in the Pigeon Pea Project.

In the previous verses in the Mark passage, Jesus speaks of the natural process of growth from the simple sowing of a single seed. We can see this reflected in the way the Pigeon Pea Project has already grown from small beginnings into a healthy community work, but with still more room to grow.

Both pictures given by Jesus are of aspects of the Kingdom of God. These too are to be seen in this work of Christian Aid, enabling people to gain a fairer sharing in the goodness the earth has to offer to all of us.

## Summarised version

### Harvest Joy; a reality or a mirage?

- Traditional picture of harvest as a time of joyful celebration; reward for labour and care.
- Dependent on weather but climate change causing increasing difficulties. For those dependent on subsistence farming, failed crops mean illness and starvation. (Isaiah 16:8 – 11).
- Malawians very largely subsistence farmers and suffering badly from climate change.

### The mustard seed

- See Mark 4:26 - 32 and reflect on thrill of watching growth to production of fruit.
- Christian Aid seeds sown in Malawi in form of pigeon peas introduced as a viable alternative to maize, being more resistant to flood and drought and yielding nutritious crops, often with a surplus for sale. This leading to better lives and hope for the future through development, especially for children able to go to school.

### A new harvest

- Success in this venture is living people real pride and great determination to do even better in future. The hope for the next generation is for survival to be turned to life in all its fullness. A relatively small input can have a massive effect (Matthew 17:20). Jesus's pictures of the Kingdom of God are reflected in this work of Christian Aid, helping Malawian farmers to gain a fairer share in the goodness God offers to all of us through his earth.

### A harvest prayer

God of creation, source of all life,  
we thank you for the richness and  
beauty of this world.

You have provided food for all your  
people, and yet sometimes we are  
unwilling to share.

Forgive us Lord when we are wilfully  
deaf to the cries our neighbours.  
We are truly sorry; inspire us to act so  
that all may receive their daily bread.

We pray for Bertha in Malawi and the  
pigeon pea project.  
We pray for Zululand Diocese and the  
food garden project.

May they be blessed with an abundant  
harvest, and may your kingdom come,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

**Amen**



Photo: Five people from Cumbria visited the pigeon pea project in March 2018

### A speaker for your church?

In March 2018 a group of Christian Aid supporters, including five from Cumbria, visited the pigeon pea project in Malawi. If you would like someone to come and talk at your church please contact Laura Jones [lkjones@christian-aid.org](mailto:lkjones@christian-aid.org). Speakers are available throughout the year for services, fundraising events and church meetings.