

Christian Aid Week sermon pack

We've provided these sermon notes to inspire your preaching during Christian Aid Week. You'll find a choice of three sets of sermon notes with suggested readings to illustrate the themes we are sharing this year. We have included the stories of two incredible mums from Sierra Leone as examples of the life-changing work your donations are helping to fund. Please feel free to share these stories when you deliver your sermon which can be adapted to suit you and your church.

Our suggested order of service contains a symbolic action you can build into your service alongside prayers, hymns and suggested songs.

This action includes adding your voice to this year's campaign. We're asking the UK Government to use its influence to drop Sierra Leone's debt on the loans given for fighting the Ebola outbreak in 2014. You will find our campaign card at the back of our daily devotional resource and also as an online petition sheet. Both these resources, along with a suite of others, can be ordered or downloaded at caweek.org/resources

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1 Stories

Jebbeh Konneh

Jebbeh is one of the kindest people you will ever meet. She has a warm smile and motherly touch. But her life has been incredibly tough.

Recently, Jebbeh's sister, Fatmata, was pregnant in a village nearby. When she went into labour there were so few ambulances that Fatmata had no choice but to walk for three hours, under the baking sun, to the nearest hospital. The road was long, and she struggled to keep walking. With every step, Fatmata feared for her life and the life of her baby. Jebbeh told us: 'My sister was crying out with hunger. She died on the side of the road. She never gave birth.'

No woman should die in childbirth. But for Jebbeh, this wasn't just any woman. This was her sister – her strength, her comfort, her own. Jebbeh herself is heavily pregnant. As her baby grows, it's not joy that fills her heart, but fear. Pregnancy should be a time of joy, not a time of fear.

But instead of buying new baby clothes, Jebbeh has gone to her sister's burial. Instead of excitement and joy, she feels pain and sorrow. She cries, and we cry with her.

This Christian Aid Week with your support, we can continue working alongside communities like Jebbeh's to build bigger, better health centres. Just £300 could provide a delivery bed and mattress for a new health centre, ensuring mums can deliver their babies safely and live long and happy lives.



Jebbeh Konneh, eight months pregnant.

1 Stories

Tenneh Bawoh

Tenneh Bawoh rests her three-month-old baby Ansumana on her lap. She bounces him on her knee and he giggles happily. Tenneh and her baby are visiting a temporary health centre in Sierra Leone for a check-up. They're attended to by nurse Judith, who delivered the baby in this room, just a few months before. Thankfully, both mum and baby are healthy. But tragically, Tenneh has loved and lost a baby before.

A few years ago, when Tenneh was pregnant with her first child, there was no health centre or trained nurse in her village. With no other choice, Tenneh was taken by her mother to a traditional birth attendant. For the two days of her labour, Tenneh was in agony. She fell unconscious, and was bleeding heavily. When at last she woke up, her whole body was swollen. In the days and months afterwards, Tenneh still felt very weak. Her baby wouldn't breastfeed. Tragically, her little one died when he was just three months old.

'I will never forget that day,' Tenneh recalls. 'I felt sick like I've never been sick before. I loved my baby so much.'

Thankfully, when Tenneh was pregnant a second time, things had changed for good. Christian Aid's partner RADA saw that Tenneh, and many mums like her, were in desperate need of healthcare. And that's how nurse Judith came to save lives. With expert love and care, nurse Judith delivered Tenneh's baby safely.

But the health centre where nurse Judith works is not enough to meet every need.

The roof leaks. There are only two delivery beds. And when mums come to deliver their babies at night, Judith has no light to see by. This makes giving birth even more dangerous.

Every day, 10 women die from giving birth in Sierra Leone. But we believe every life is worth fighting for. This Christian Aid Week, you could help give more mums and babies across the world the greatest gift – the gift of life. With your support, Tenneh's community could build a bigger, better health centre to help ensure more mums see their babies grow and enjoy fullness of life. Nurse Judith says: 'I know that for women here, thanks to Christian Aid, our situation is going to change.'



Tenneh Bawoh and her three-month-old son, Ansumana Bangalie.

2 Sermon notes

Based on the Acts reading for Christian Aid Sunday 12 May

The legacy of two incredible women

Readings

Acts 9:36-43

Ritual cleansing

- When Tabitha/Dorcas became ill and died, her body was washed in the customary way. This practice is also part of death rituals in Sierra Leone. During the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2016, it was very difficult for communities to stop ritual washing in order to prevent the spread of the disease.
- It was thanks to ministers such as the Rev Christiana Sutton-Koroma, who partnered with Christian Aid during the Ebola crisis, that the message to prevent the spread of disease by stopping ritual washing was heard. She was instrumental in leading safe and dignified burials for people who were killed by Ebola without the need for the ritual washing.
- When the Rev Christiana was asked to share a message of inspiration with the churches of Britain and Ireland this Christian Aid Week, she turned to the book of Acts and repeated the words of Paul's dream from Acts 16: 'come to Macedonia and help us'. We too draw inspiration from Acts as we respond to her invitation to participate in the mission of God this Christian Aid Week in our communities and in Sierra Leone.

Grief that changes to joy

- There is much grief in this story from the book of Acts, grief for the loss of the generous and skillful Dorcas. The grief of a life cut short is all too resonant with the stories being shared from Sierra Leone this Christian Aid Week, the death of mothers in childbirth and babies in infancy.
- Dorcas had clearly touched the lives of those gathered around her at the time of her death. The stories of her good works, her generosity and her skills gushed from those who mourned her. Hers was a life that had already left a legacy in the lives of those around her, we can only imagine how generously and abundantly she lived after being raised from death!
- When we encounter our own vulnerability, maybe through sickness, life-altering or even near-death experiences, we often resolve to live in a more intentional or generous way. Beryl Margaret Hadwin is one such inspiration. Beryl was a midwife, a nurse, a matron – healthcare was something that was important to her.

- When Beryl awoke from an operation in later life, a nurse was there for her, holding her hand. In that moment Beryl resolved to leave a gift in her Will to make a difference to healthcare across the world through the work of Christian Aid. Her healthcare gift is now helping make a difference to the lives of mums in Sierra Leone.
- Through her gift, Beryl is able to extend her hand to touch the lives of others so they too will know the comfort of a hand holding theirs when they need it. Whether it's collecting this Christian Aid Week, taking the campaign action to drop Sierra Leone's Ebola debt, joining us in prayer for transformation in Sierra Leone, leaving us a gift in your Will – it all allows us to reach out into the world, be there for others and make a difference.

A legacy of life

- This Christian Aid Week, we are all invited to participate in the legacy of Dorcas and of Beryl as we get to give generously to the work of partners such as RADA who are working to improve the healthcare in Sierra Leone. They are building health centres so mothers no longer have to walk long distances to give birth, and are training healthcare professionals.
- Share Jebbeh's story (see page 2). With you by their side, pregnant mums like Jebbeh can now hope to deliver safely, with the gift of a better health clinic. Hopefully she will not suffer the same tragic fate of her sister who died giving birth on the way to a health centre that was a three-hour walk away.
- And thanks to healthcare professionals such as nurse Judith, supported by RADA, mums like Jebbeh and Tenneh have someone they can rely on. Nurse Judith has helped Tenneh give birth to a healthy baby boy and recover from the traumatic birth and sad death of her first baby.
- May Dorcas and Beryl inspire us all to consider what legacy we might give in our time, talent and resources this Christian Aid Week.



Better hygiene practices are helping mums and babies lead healthier lives.

3 Sermon notes

**Based on Revelations readings for Christian Aid
Sunday 12 May and 19 May**

Every tear wiped away

Readings

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 21:1-6

Revelation

- John writes of his vision in the book of Revelation. It is a revelation that brings not only hope for the future, but also a vision of how God wants the world to be. John writes Revelation at a time when the Roman Empire is advancing. The Empire seeks more and more political and economic power. And to get it the Romans demand that their own emperors and traditional gods are worshipped. But John is providing another way, the way of worshipping God. The scenes he describes provide encouragement to the early churches to directly challenge the powers that would suppress the kingdom of God.

Wipe away ever tear

- In both his vision in the throne room of Revelation 7 and in seeing the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21), John draws our attention to God wiping away every tear from the eyes of those who have suffered:
 - 'They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' (Revelation 7:16-17)
 - 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' (Revelation 21:3-4)
- One can only imagine how these words might bring comfort to the thousands bereaved by the devastation of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone between 2014-2016. And for those who lose loved ones and babies in childbirth at an alarming rate still – Sierra Leone is the most dangerous place in the world to become a mum due to the lack of healthcare facilities. Share Jebbeh or Tenneh's story from pages 2 and 3.
- Reflecting on John's vision, the Rev Christiana Sutton-Koroma, a minister in Sierra Leone who partners with Christian Aid to spread healthcare messages, says: 'There will no longer be tears in the eyes of women as it is now, when there are not enough hospitals to take care of pregnant women.'

- The tears of Jebbeh who lost her sister in childbirth will be wiped away. The tears of Tenneh who mourns the death of her first baby will be wiped away. In a country where 10 women die every day in childbirth, John's vision declares there will be no more death, no more mourning.
- Take a moment to imagine a heaven on earth, where every tear will be wiped from our eyes, every tear. John does not share this revelation of an 'other' world that leaves us depressed with the knowledge that it cannot be realised. He is not just awakening our desire for how things can be and leaving us there. John's revelation can change us.



'I'm afraid,' Jebbeh says. 'I pray, when that day comes, God will help me to deliver safely, so that I can have a bouncing baby and I'll be healthy.'

Bringing heaven to earth

- This vision of heaven allows us to look at life on earth in a new light. The heavenly visions of Revelation show us how God wants things to be, this is what we are asking for every time we pray the Lord's Prayer – when we say – 'your will be done, your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven'. John shares this vision of heaven, not only so that we can hope for the future, but so that we can be inspired by a vision of how God wants the world to be.
- This Christian Aid Week we get to participate in bringing that vision of heaven to earth with every envelope we give out or fill, every Big Brekkie we host, every fundraiser we organise or attend – all of these are an opportunity to enter into helping this vision of heaven on earth to be realised. (This is a good opportunity to share how your church is taking part in Christian Aid Week and how others can get involved.)
- And as well as partnering with RADA in Sierra Leone to provide improved health services for mums and babies, we also get to do what John was seeking to do in his revelation: challenge the political and economic systems that are oppressing and marginalising the community there.
- While the government of Sierra Leone is still paying back the loans it was given to help cope with the Ebola crisis, it struggles to fund adequate health clinics, proper health training, or enough ambulances. Debt repayments are taking money away from the healthcare that is desperately needed to tackle death in childbirth.
- This Christian Aid Week we can call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help ensure all Sierra Leone's debts it received for fighting Ebola are written off, and take urgent action to prevent any new debt crises in developing countries and tackle them when they arise. This Christian Aid Week, as well as a vision of all tears being wiped away, we are calling out for the tearing up of Sierra Leone's Ebola debt.

4 Sermon notes

Sermon for any Sunday

The midwives' legacy

Readings

Exodus 1:15-22

Shiprah and Puah

- The lesser known and radical story of Shiprah and Puah that precedes the birth of Moses is a wonderful example of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience. The midwives refuse to obey the Pharaoh's deathly command to kill all the newborn baby boys in his attempt to control and reduce the number of Israelites. He fears they will overpower their Egyptian captors.
- Shiprah and Puah refused to comply with the Pharaoh's commands since to do so would be to do the complete opposite of what they were called to as midwives, that is to bring life safely into the world. To explain why the 'death at birth' policy was not working, they made up a story to explain themselves to the authorities saying the Hebrew women just give birth too quickly before they could get there!
- There was no doubt that for the baby boys, including Moses who was soon to be born to Jochabed, Egypt was a very dangerous place to be born. These first two chapters of Exodus demonstrate the ingenuity and creativity of women in the face of such adversity. Shiprah, Puah, Jochabed, Miriam, and even Pharaoh's daughter demonstrate how naïve Pharaoh was to think that by only getting rid of the boys he would have no trouble to contend with!

Tenneh's story

- Like Egypt, Sierra Leone is a very dangerous place to give birth but for different reasons. In Sierra Leone 10 women die giving birth every day and one in nine babies do not reach their fifth birthday. The lack of midwives and trained healthcare professionals are part of the problem.
- Share Tenneh's story (page 3) and how nurse Judith delivered her baby safely.



'During my second labour, I was scared. But nurse Judith was with me, assuring me of everything. When I delivered, I felt so good,' said Tenneh Bawoh.

The midwives' legacy

- Christian Aid supporter Beryl Margaret Hadwin didn't only deliver babies safely into the world in life as a midwife. Even after her death, she is still ensuring babies are safely delivered thanks to the generous legacy gift she left to Christian Aid for healthcare projects in Africa.
- After waking up after eye surgery in later life, Beryl saw an African nurse holding her hand. From that moment on, she vowed to leave a gift to healthcare in Africa.
- Beryl sadly passed away in 2015. But her love lives on through the Ellis-Hadwin Health Legacy – a fund set up in her name to deliver a three-year health programme in Africa, specifically in Burundi, Sierra Leone and South Sudan, as well as Kenya and Nigeria.
- Beryl's gift means women and babies around the world can survive and thrive. It is her legacy that has helped to support nurse Judith and fund a three-year health programme in Africa.
- This Christian Aid Week we get to be inspired by midwife Beryl's legacy and participate in furthering her wonderful work by giving and fundraising for the work of Christian Aid. And we get to be inspired by the legacy of Shiprah and Puah who resisted and challenged the political policies of the day.
- Sierra Leone struggles to provide better healthcare, including trained midwives. The Ebola crisis killed 10% of its healthcare professionals and the burden of debt left from the loans they received to respond to the crisis doesn't help. Inspired by the legacy of Beryl, not only can we contribute to the training of more nurses in Sierra Leone in our generous giving, but we can also be inspired by Shiprah and Puah to challenge the political decisions that are taking money away from the healthcare that is so desperately needed to tackle death in childbirth.
- This Christian Aid Week we are calling on the UK Government to do something about Sierra Leone's debt crisis. As the fourth largest shareholder in the International Monetary Fund, the UK has huge influence. We're calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure all Sierra Leone's debts on the loans it received for fighting the Ebola outbreak are written off. We're also asking the Chancellor to take urgent action to prevent new debt crises in developing countries and tackle them effectively when they arise.
- It might not require the same 'creative storytelling' as Shiprah and Puah but it is following in their legacy of speaking truth to power by our actions.

