

Sermon 19th March 2017. Exodus 17:1-7, Romans 5:1-11 and John 4:5-16, 19-26 and 39-42.

Yemen, Nigeria, south sudan and somalia are all reaching crisis point. The people there are hungry, not just the hunger that we feel when we miss a meal but actually suffering from a physical hunger that can and does lead to death. Wouldn't it be lovely if like Moses we could provide water and food for the people in these countries. There is an appeal at the moment to help raise funds to provide food, water and medication to those in need. Wait a moment most people reply, haven't we done this before? Didn't we have live aid and various other charity events over the years to help these people. Isn't that what red nose day is for? Why should we give our hard earned money to help them when they don't help themselves? There will always be a level of criticism thrown at the charities who raise funds, how much are they paying themselves? Why aren't they doing the work for free? And my favourite, if they didn't waste money sending me a pen or christmas cards how much more money would they have to give to those in need. I am not an expert and I don't know how much administration costs charities incur, but it does require some of the funding to help collect the money and distribute the food, water and medications. Many people do work for free, giving up their own valuable holiday time to go over to these countries to help out in any way possible. Yes I am aware that there are those in these countries who are extremely wealthy, they could perhaps do more. We don't live in these countries and so to a certain extent we aren't aware of how their governments operate. Yes we hear stories in the news about dictatorships and we see well meaning journalists going around the camps and interviewing people who live in these countries, however what we see and hear is probably not a true representation of what is happening. All news stories have a slant to them, the stories may even be slightly biased according to who is doing the reporting or editing. Unless we actually live in these countries we cannot truly understand what life is like, we may get a glimpse into the way people live when we go on holiday, but this is nothing like living day to day in these counties. When it comes to helping themselves, those that are truly in need are those that are more than likely poorly or totally uneducated. They perhaps don't even begin to know how to help themselves. There are charities outside of the church who help educate people, not just in reading and writing, but how to grow and tend to their own crops. Fairtrade is a wonderful organisations that helps people to set up co-ops, so that they learn how to sell the produce grown to the western world. Here in lies the problem, the western world. A world where we are comfortable, a world where we can pretty much buy what we want when we want it. A world where some of us can buy food and then throw the majority of it away because it is passed its used by date. So what if it has? Does it matter if there is a small amount of mold on the food, mold is only a form of penicillin so I am told. We also like to complain

about the cost of our food and want to shop and buy everything as cheaply as we can. When we do this we cut down on the profits that the person at the beginning of the food chain receives, so we are therefore slightly responsible for some of the problems. I know the big bosses of our supermarkets allegedly pay themselves large bonus, but shouldn't we take a stance and make sure we buy responsibly, otherwise we become like the Israelites forever complaining about our lot when in fact we have nothing really to complain about.

In romans we are told that our suffering happens for a reason, our suffering we are told helps us to gain endurance; this in turn helps build our characters and through this we gain hope. I am not sure how much these words help the people who are starving. They may help us understand our own issues and why we are who we are, they may even help us to find hope in our own lives and eventually reconciliation through Christ's death. Sometimes these words can bring little or no comfort to the most faithful so imagine how people who have not received or do not know of God's grace must feel when they read this passage from Romans. John follows the theme of water with this parable of Jesus the Jew and the samaritan woman. First Jesus asks for a drink and then goes on to have a conversation about living water with the woman. Jesus isn't bothered what faith she is, what her cultural beliefs are or even that she is a woman at a well, alone and talking to a strange man in broad daylight. Jesus's only concern is that she begins a journey of faith so that she too can receive this living water and gain eternal life. Jesus is not concerned with himself but in how he can help this woman begin a journey of faith. Jesus is not concerned with bringing her to a fully rounded and mature faith, he is just interested in the fact that for this woman the journey is beginning Jesus is happy it seems for her to take the seed he has planted nurture it, water it and let it evolve over time into something that is fruitful and rewarding. Something that she will share with others in conversation, that will hopefully bring them to drink of this living water too. Whether you give your time or your money to this on going crisis in the east is no concern of mine. What does concern me is that the western world seems quite content to leave some of the poorest people in the southern hemisphere to suffer at the hands of their leaders,. If we don't do something positive to help now, this cycle of starvation and the need to raise money will continue indefinitely. We need to take a positive stance and each individual christian needs to decide what they can realistically do to help. Jesus didn't turn his back on his fellow man and neither should we, if we want to profess the faith of the man who gave his life for us so that we can be free of our sin and be reconciled to God, then shouldn't we be prepared to give of ourselves. Amen