

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

I wonder if the name of Janet Lacey CBE means anything to you? Born in Sunderland in 1903, into a strong Methodist family, her Dad died when she was just nine. Her mother found Janet very tiresome and difficult and so she was packed off to stay with an aunt in Bishop Auckland.

As soon as she was able, she left home and her first foray into the world of work was with the YWCA in Kendal. There she worked for six years until she was moved to Dagenham in 1932, to a new housing estate where twenty-three thousand children were later evacuated as the Second World War broke out, and Janet worked tirelessly promoting her organisation's aims and goals.

When peace returned to these shores in 1945, Janet received another challenge. She was asked to go to Germany and see what could be done for the young people whose families and homes had disappeared and who were living in refugee conditions in large camps.

This was her first glimpse of the outcasts of a society that had been largely responsible for making them outcast, and the experience troubled her very deeply.

She began to realise that it was a problem not confined to Germany. It was already a world problem, and something had to be done about it.

There was no time for legislation. While the nations discussed, the poor souls would die.

So, for Janet, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan had a real relevance at that moment.

"If you call yourself a Christian," she said, "then you have a responsibility to the world."

"Suppose the Good Samaritan had been just another well-intentioned politician. He comes across the man who had been beaten up on the Jericho Road, decides that there is too much of this thuggery going on, and it is up to the politicians like himself to see that the Road is policed, and that laws are passed to ensure heavier punishments when the delinquents are caught. He hasn't time to stop for any practical help at the moment; he sees his first priority as getting back to the legislature and protesting about the dangers of that run down area. So, what happens to the injured man while all this lengthy legal debate goes on? The man dies!"

And so, she worked tirelessly in the British Council of Churches Interchurch Aid and Refugee Department, and when she was appointed to the department, its income had dropped to £25,000, but Janet increased it to £2,500,000 per year during her time there.

She was adamant that it was the Church that had to be at the forefront to help to defeat the hell of global poverty, and, with that vision before her, Christian Aid was born in 1957, and Janet was its Founder and Director. Indeed, for many years, Christian Aid was Janet Lacey, and right from its birth, she led the fight for the hungry world. She aided in the organisation's focus on global poverty and helped to set up funding for development in 40 countries.

Facing criticism from several sources, she was never one to be diverted from the cause, and she helped to put Christian Aid on the tongue and in the heart as well as on the map, gaining for its work a respect and an honour which has put it above criticism.

A force to be reckoned with, Janet was the first woman to be invited to preach in St Paul's Cathedral and later at Liverpool Cathedral, and when she retired as Director of Christian Aid in 1968, she found many charities clamouring for her services.

A journalist asked her about the motivation which brought her to devote a professional career to serving other people and he was given a very direct, brief answer, "We can kill each other, or we can heal each other. I have made my choice."

It was Janet who coined the phrase, "Need, not creed", that has been at the very foundation of her organisation all down the years to the present day.

This year, Christian Aid Week begins on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May, and 76 years after it was established, the work that this organisation does on our behalf is just as vital, if not more so, as the world continues to battle with the Coronavirus pandemic.

The fundamental truth of Christian Aid remains unchanged in 2021 – we are one human family, separated, broken apart, but together. In the brokenness of poverty and exclusion, we find our common life, our shared humanity.

In Bangladesh today, attending to the needs of 70,000 Rohingya refugees in one of the camps where Christian Aid was asked by the United Nations and the Bangladesh Government to take charge of management.

In Kasai, in the Congo, a largely forgotten crisis where an estimated 1.3 million people have been displaced by armed conflict and rights' violations, Christian Aid is supporting internally displaced people with basic food supplies.

This year, Christian Aid Week is also highlighting the threat of climate change on tea producers in Kenya; there are new projects being set up to bring fresh water to communities where folk walk for miles every day to fetch water which is diseased and polluted for their families.

To overcome poverty, to eradicate disease; to nurture creation; to bring health facilities; to build homes, to act in all these ways is what Janet Lacey dreamt of all those years ago. Surely a sign for our love for God, our love for His people everywhere.

This week, of all weeks, we recognise that globally and locally, we are one body.

Christian Aid is a wonderful opportunity to express our unity in the midst of our broken world.

We give to the work of Christian Aid this week as a symbol of our shared commitment to the one global family to which we belong. We may not be able to distribute or collect those red Christian Aid envelopes this year, but we can give online.

We are invited to be part of something extraordinary that Janet Lacey began, united as one family as never before.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister