

2022 Harvest Pack



• Ethiopian Self Help Group member, Aynate. Credit: Gavin Leane

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“Behold
I make
all things
new”

~Revelation 21:5

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 6:1-7

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Bible Passages

Sermon Outline



Woman from Ethiopian Self Help Group, Nazaret. Credit: Gavin Leane

What a challenging age we live in –

between the pandemic, climate change, the war in Ukraine and more than 100 million people now displaced from their homes, the needs are enormous.

Jesus was familiar with the physical needs of people:

• Needs for food • Needs for healing • Needs for relational wholeness

When he encountered the needs, he did not shy away from them. He fed people, he healed people, he listened to their pain. Often in those encounters he was “filled with compassion” for the needs of others. (Mark 1:41)

Sometimes we encounter the pain, heartache and needs of people.

Maybe you have had some of those experiences in your life?

It can be difficult, costly and challenging to discern the best path forward. At Tearfund we are often confronted by those in greatest need.

- We hear of those devastated by disasters
- We hear of those displaced from their homes.
- We hear of parents forced to send children away to fend for themselves.
- We hear of disease and poor living conditions
- We hear of the ravages of climate challenges
- We hear of the inequality and inequity of our world
- We hear of those in extreme poverty
- We hear phrases like “the hunger season.” The gap between when food from the harvest runs out and families are forced to wait for the next harvest.

Have you heard of the hunger season before?



Hunger Season

One of those countries where people are dealing with the Hunger Season is Ethiopia. A beautiful country, yet impacted by:

- Explosive population growth
- Extreme poverty
- Ongoing climate challenges
- More recently severe internal tensions
- It's a country where millions of people are living with the Hunger Season.



Our theme today is

📷 Lone plant growing in drought in Ethiopia. Credit: Tearfund Canada

“Behold I make all things new”

and although the situation for those we work with in Ethiopia is very serious because of the hunger season we can see God making all things new through the work of our church partners there.

We are so thankful for our church partners in Ethiopia who serve faithfully in bringing hope to their corner of our world. Often they feel overwhelmed, insufficient and inadequate and yet they carry on with great faith. They deal with the issues in their context as they are motivated by the relentless love of Jesus. That is what Tearfund Ireland is about. We mobilise God's church in the very poorest places to release the God given potential in their communities.

Churches are reaching out with God's love and meeting those intense needs. The hungry are being fed, the poor are being clothed and children can attend school, all in the name of Christ!

Passage Insights

As followers of Jesus, we are to be people that share our faith, but also see and help those in need. That is the calling of the church. Love God. Love People. This is what we see in the formation of the church in our Bible passage today.

- The church has been birthed in an incredible way. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the sounds and sights of that event. How incredible for those who were there.

- Miracles are taking place, many are being healed

- Everyday people are embracing Jesus and experiencing a personal and dynamic faith

- Homes are being opened for meals and conversation

- Religious leaders in Jerusalem are trying to figure things out

- People are sharing their possessions

- But, we have also seen the dark side of people with the attitudes of Ananias and Sapphira and their untimely deaths. (The Bible does not shy away for telling the full story)

Here in the book of Acts the church was growing rapidly! Everything was new. People were excited about their new -found faith. Others were being invited to be a part of the excitement. This was the place to be! In many ways, this was simply a time of trying to figure things out! The believers were getting organized and assigning responsibilities. Working both within established systems and creating new systems. We come to Acts 6:1-7 (READ passage) Here is the reality. We know that whenever something new is started that sometimes certain things are overlooked. Not intentionally or meant to hurt anyone, it just happens! In the organisation of the early church, the widows were overlooked. As a part of that excitement, there were also some complaints! The Greek speaking believers complained about the Hebrew speaking believers, saying that their widows were being neglected.

Passage Insights

There are two problems:

1. The widows are not being fed and
2. There are murmurings in the community.

What we are seeing is a little bit of a culture clash! The Hebrew Jews were those from Judea and were more inclined to embrace Jewish culture. The Greek Jews were more inclined to embrace Greek culture. Coming from the provinces to the city. To simplify, the Hebrew Jews saw the Greek Jews as those who had compromised in some way with Greek culture. The Greek Jews saw the Hebrew Jews as those who were traditionalists and maybe carried a “holier than thou” attitude. There was this natural suspicion that existed between the two groups.

It might remind us of how we sometimes see people from other cultures in our own setting?

It is important to know that even though we are talking about two different groups of Jews, they are Christians who have chosen to follow Jesus as their Messiah. The care of widows and orphans is a common theme in scripture. With the growth of the early church, they organised the daily distribution to those in need. Greek widows were especially vulnerable as they were far from home, perhaps without natural family connections and perhaps also a language barrier. Somehow there were some who were being “overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” Eventually, the word of the complaint reached the ears of the disciples.

They did what anyone in church leadership does—they called a meeting! Let’s get to the bottom of the problem! We do not know many of the details about the meeting, other than the desire to fix the problem. They called all the disciples together. The apostles want to continue teaching the word. The Apostles reflected that “It would not be right for us to neglect God’s Word.” They want to see the continued growth of the church.

Passage Insights

However, providing for the needs of the widows was a priority too. The solution is to appoint 7 people to look after the food program. It's a great picture of people serving in their area of giftedness. When you are serving in your area of giftedness you feel fulfilled and motivated and other people benefit from your gifts. We know that as followers of Jesus Christ that we are each gifted in unique ways. So, seven men are selected to be servants in the food program.

We are told several things about this decision:


- a. They were full of the Holy Spirit and faith
- b. They are given responsibility
- c. Everyone liked the idea
- d. They were commissioned to do the job

The results were that God's message continued to spread. The number of believers increased and many Jewish priests came to faith in Jesus! (And, we assume that the widows were fed!)

What the early church was going through is what we in Tearfund might call "Church & Community Transformation" (CCT). Coming to grips with what holistic ministry looks like in both word and deed. One of the countries where our church partners have been practicing CCT is Ethiopia.

Let's go to Ethiopia and meet a lone parent named Ngist whose life has been radically changed by connection with her local church engaging in her community.



 Nigist from an Ethiopian Self Help Group shares her story. Credit: Tearfund Canada

WATCH THE VIDEO HERE

- Did you hear how Nigist was living in extreme poverty? She was without hope with no place to turn.
- Her main problem was not having enough food and she carried the burden of having to feed nine children. She lived the reality of the Hunger Season.
- Can you imagine having to eat leaves to survive?
- The family suffered from hunger and disease with no money to pay for medical care.
- She lost all her farm animals because of drought
- She says in her own words, “I endured years of darkness, years of suffering, hunger and death.”
- She had no options, other than to believe that God had a way! For Nigist it was a daily struggle for survival as the Hunger Season devastated her family

Then, one day new things began to happen – Nigist was invited to a local church. A local church that cared for people. A local church that was well aware of the needs of their community. A local church that went outside their walls to set up Self Help Groups and training programmes in agriculture to help the poorest in the community beat the hunger gap.

So, if we were to go to that church today, we would sit in the circle and hear Nigist’s story of transformation. You would hear her story of how all things have become new, her journey from extreme poverty to sufficiency. You would hear her deep gratitude for all who made this possible; it all seems like a small picture of what the early church was like in the Book of Acts, yet our church partners are seeing it in Ethiopia today.

Nigist has escaped the Hunger Season and yet millions of people still suffer with that painful reality in the Horn of Africa today.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Right now there is a serious food shortage in Ethiopia. €100 will provide enough food and seeds for an entire family for a month. Or, for €30 a month for 2 years you can provide a farmer like Nigist with 2 years of agricultural training! Whatever gift you give will go directly to the place of greatest need in Ethiopia. Our opportunity today is to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Transforming communities in places where extreme poverty has been accepted as a way of life.

Let’s embrace the words of the Proverbs writer in Proverbs 31:8-9

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, you created the beautiful world that we live in out of nothing. You continue to make all things new.

Thank you for Tearfund Ireland's partners reaching out into their communities around the world, bringing transformation and new life in your name.

We pray that you would encourage them today and provide them with the resources that need they reach out into their communities against the backdrop of changing climate, hunger, conflict and Covid-19.

We thank you for the many people like Ngist who have seen you make all things new in their lives and circumstances. We ask you for many more Self Help Groups to be set up in the coming year and that the Self Help Group movement would go from strength to strength.

We offer you our hands and feet to bring your new life in the communities in which you have placed us.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen

