

PENTECOST 15C 18092022 The Reverend Lorna Green

Jeremiah 8.18 – 9.1; Psalm 79.1-9; 1 Timothy 2.1-10; Luke 16.1-13

Today's lectionary readings are particularly difficult, so today I'm going to avoid the problem and talk to you about what I got up to in Canberra instead.

If you would like a copy of the sermon I preached on these readings three years ago there are printouts available.

On Monday 5th September I flew to Canberra with Archdeacon Angela Webb, representing Archbishop Kay. We were invited to join the fourth annual Micah Women Leaders Delegation, which is an initiative of Micah Australia, bringing together women leaders from across the Australian Church to advocate for the poorest and most vulnerable people in our world. I was part of the 2019 delegation.

This year's delegation of 36 women, representing about a dozen denominations, were advocating together on the 'Help Fight Famine' campaign.

Micah Australia is a coalition of Christian International development agencies under the leadership of Reverend Tim Costello.

Micah Australia empowers Australian Christians to advocate on the most urgent global justice issues facing the world today- extreme poverty and hunger, rising conflict and climate change.

You may not know, because there has been little interest in the media, that 50 million people in 45 countries are on the verge of famine. Conflict, covid, climate shocks and now the war in Ukraine have combined to create the perfect storm for an unprecedented global hunger crisis.

This is not the same old world hunger story you've heard before. Covid-19 more than doubled the number of people living with life-threatening hunger. Meanwhile, in the Horn of Africa there have been four failed rainy seasons.

The top five at-risk countries are Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan and Afghanistan- where people are facing famine conditions of starvation and death.

Famines are extreme historical events, declared in areas where at least one in five households are experiencing extreme deprivation of food and catastrophic levels of child malnutrition, starvation and death.

Famine has only been declared twice this century: in Somalia in 2011 and in parts of South Sudan in 2017. In 2011 Australia contributed \$112m to the Horn of Africa crisis and was one of the top five country donors. Unfortunately, the world took too long to respond and by the time famine was declared, more than 100,000 people had already died. A total of 260,000 had died by the beginning of 2012, more than half of them children.

In 2017 the humanitarian response for South Sudan was more rapid, saving countless lives.

Micah is calling on the Australian government to do three things:

- to commit to an urgent \$150m famine prevention package to avert catastrophe in the world's worst-affected hunger hot-spots in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen
- to tackle root causes of the global hunger crisis, through investing in a targeted Global Food Security Strategy; and
- to strengthen the resilience of the Asia-Pacific region to climate change, disaster, and economic shocks by rebuilding Australia's development assistance budget.

If there is one piece of good news, it is that Australian non-government organisations and global partners like the World Food Program have the expertise, field presence and operational scale to stop famine in its tracks- but right now the world is not acting quickly enough.

After a day of briefing and getting to know our allocated groups, we met at Parliament House at 7:15am on Wednesday 9th- and it was freezing! After a Welcome to Country and group photos we went through the security checks and were escorted to a meeting room for a breakfast with the Honourable Pat Conroy, Minister for Defence Industry and Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Kirsty Robertson is the CEO of Catholic humanitarian agency Caritas Australia, and she met told us all about Mali, who she met in Ethiopia in June. Mali's story gives a human face to the overwhelming statistics of hunger and despair.

Then Revd. Amel Manyon - a South Sudanese refugee who is now a Uniting Church minister in Adelaide - shared the devastating reality for her extended family back in her home country.

Amel told us they simply are not being given enough food by the UN, with children starving and women risking their safety to leave the camp in search of whatever they can find.

Minister Conroy listened to these and gave a speech in which he stated that giving support to countries facing famine is not just the strategic or political thing to do- it is the right and moral thing to do. It was a passionate, powerful speech, and I have copies if you would like to read it.

Then, in groups of between three and five, we set off for meetings with politicians in their offices.

Archdeacon Angela and I were together with Jo Knight, who is the CEO of Anglican Overseas Aid.

Our first meeting was with Sam Lim, the newly-elected Member for Tagney in WA. He grew up in poverty in Malaysia and understood immediately what we were talking about and was keen to receive briefing and speech notes from Micah.

Next we met with Kate Chaney, another new member and a 'Teal'; she was elected to Curtin, Julie Bishop's old seat. She had already had a briefing from DFAT- the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade- asking for information about the food crisis. Ms Chaney was also glad to be offered more information and briefing notes. Ms Chaney worked for Anglicare in Perth for 5 years before her election to parliament, so she understands issues of hardship and poverty.

Our next meeting was cancelled as a committee was called; this happens when parliament is sitting, it is an incredibly busy place. Angela and I hope to catch up with that MP in Perth.

Lastly we met with Jordan Steele-John, who has been in parliament since 2017. He too was happy to receive more information; he has met with people from Micah previously and was positive and engaged.

The following day we had a de-brief and heard from various women about their conversations with MPs. Many had said they would write or speak to the Prime Minister, make a speech, or otherwise promote #HelpFightFamine in any way they could; some have already put up posters on their office doors and notice boards and posted on social media. Labor MP Alicia Payne wasted no time, taking to the floor of parliament that same afternoon to speak.

You may be wondering- what can WE do? The best way to help is by donating to aid agencies like the Anglican Board of Mission and Australian Overseas Aid.

Another important action is to write to your federal member, and I have guidelines for writing letters.

You may also be wondering- how can Australia help, when we have big problems here at home? Don't we already give enough aid? Good question!

Overseas aid in Australia is currently at a historic low of 0.2% of gross national income: that's just 20 cents of every \$100. Compared with other wealthy OECD countries, Australia ranks 21st out of 29 nations.

Australia has donated around \$300 million in military aid to Ukraine; we are asking for half that amount to support 50 million people. It is a modest ask in response to a global crisis.

Jesus had a lot to say about taking care of the poor and feeding the hungry. I have copies of a paper by Tim Costello for everyone; in it he discusses the Biblical call to help feed the hungry.

Please pray for people affected by this perfect storm of conflict, covid and climate shock; pray for aid agencies that are on the ground already; and pray for our government, that they will make the decision to provide aid because it is the right thing to do.