

## *Bennochty 15th May 2011: "Christian Aid week"*

Transformation is not always about changing what people see as the most significant; often it is the significance of the insignificant.

In the 1980s New York and its underground was rife with crime. The high point was 1990, 20,000 felonies on the underground, not to mention harassment and other minor crimes, but by the end of the decade this had fallen by 75%. What made the difference? A crackdown on graffiti, virtually every carriage, inside and out was covered with it, and fare dodging. It was not seen to be worthwhile trying to prosecute people for the sake of just over a dollar. Not the most serious of crimes, but in targeting them, they reached a tipping point that made all the difference. It was the changing of these seemingly insignificant crimes that changed the environment and people's behaviour.

It was based on a theory called 'Broken windows' (page 141).

See exodus 3:13-14. Who is God? God is I AM. Jesus says I am the gate, one of the famous 'I am' sayings found in John's gospel. John 10:10. Jesus raison d'être is transformation. As he met people, lives were changed, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the man born blind, Lazarus, Mary and John. John 10:10. That promise can be understood in two ways, our own personal experience of Christ and how our lives have been changed, **and** how we can be the hands, the voice and the heart of Jesus in the transformation of the lives of others. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you". We are called & challenged to be agents of transformation, both to the friend and to the stranger.

The 'I am' saying were always directly related to what was happening round about Jesus. Before Lazarus was raised to life, he said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11: 25) In John 10, Jesus is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep. Who enters by the gate and who knows his sheep by name. Contrast that with the thief, who enters by other means and whose sole intention is to steal. This passage tells us something about the nature and character of Jesus. To enter into his life, brings security and salvation, life in all its fullness. But to be transformed, means accepting the man

who was rejected. (John 9: 34) In other words transformation comes about through a most unlikely source and is never based on power, but on trust.

Scripture gives us two great images of transformation. In Ezekiel 37 there is the transformation of the valley of dry bones in to the army of God. In Acts 2 we see the transformation of a group of frightened men to the early church, witnessing in the heart of Jerusalem. The hidden disciples becomes a vibrant community.

This is Christian Aid Sunday and Christian Aid seeks to transform communities by giving people the means to take control of their lives. This is far more than an aid program, and it is where we come in. We will probably never visit such places and meet the people whose stories Christian Aid shares, but as Christians, we still have a responsibility to care for the stranger, as the people of Israel had for the strangers in their midst. . As we give financially we are the hands, the voice and the heart of Jesus.

The story in the film clip focuses on a co-operative in Los Alpes, Nicaragua and shows transformation of that community through growing good quality coffee at a fair price, offering credit facilities and building a school. This is hope for coming generations reflected in new opportunities and new ambitions.

In Acts 2, the early church praised God and enjoyed the good will of the people, and God added to their number those who were being saved. In such communities, I believe Samaritan women, teachers of the law, former blind men and even people raised from death would be accepted.

Communities that welcome, communities based on mutual trust, communities that pray and work to end poverty. John 10: 10. Life affirmed, never denied. There's a challenge, for us here in Kirkcaldy, in Nicaragua and for all God's creation.

For Christian Aid, life in all its fullness is "Life before death"

Amen.