

Act Justly update 4

Seeds of Hope

A seed may look small and lifeless – but that's not the full story. The trick is to see the potential, to see things as God sees them. To have a vision of things as they could be, or, as in God's kingdom, they will be.

Introduction

Ask group members to share stories about people who have supported and believed in them as they have grown up. It may be helpful to brief someone to start the discussion.

Worship

1 Meditate on Matthew 13:8.

To help people do this, give them each at least one seed (try using sunflower seeds) to hold. Then read the verse aloud several times. Look at the seed as it is now. Think about what the seed could become.

- 2 Sing songs that will be appropriate for your group. You could include:
- 'Everlasting God, (Yesterday, Today and Forever)', Vicky Beeching, Thankyou Music, 2002.
 - 'Give thanks to the Lord (Forever)', Chris Tomlin, Six Steps Music/EMI, 2000.

Word

As Jesus begins to teach his followers, he uses parables to explain the nature and impact of the new kingdom that God is establishing.

Read Mark 4:26-34

- How would these parables have related to the lives of the people who first heard them?
- What is Jesus saying about the kingdom of God through these parables?
- Why did Jesus choose seeds in both parables to demonstrate his message?
- What is your reaction to these parables? How do they challenge you?
- Read the story below. How do these parables relate to Jusu and his situation?

When Sierra Leone's ten-year civil war ended in January 2002, Jusu Kanneh was overjoyed to return to his home village of Jojoima, with his wife Hawa and their children. But, like many families, they returned with little more than the clothes they stood up in to find their property destroyed and land completely overgrown.

The returning villagers were helped by Christian Aid's partner organisation, the Association for People's Empowerment (APEM). Once the land had been cleared, farmers received a bushel of rice seed to plant, costing around £5/€7.50. With hard work, Jusu turned his seeds into a harvest of 16 bushels of rice.

Hawa, Jusu's wife, says: 'When APEM came we were able to start again. With the proceeds from the rice we were able to buy things for the family. We bought food, cooking utensils and clothes for the children.' And with the four bushels Jusu has kept for replanting, the family hopes to harvest 50 bushels next year.



Jusu and Hawa Kanneh, in the village they have returned to after 11 years of civil war in Sierra Leone

Although people in Sierra Leone are being helped to rebuild their livelihoods after the civil war, they also face a different threat from the injustice of the world trading system. After the long civil war, the country is heavily dependent on support from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But this money comes with conditions. Sierra Leone has been forced to sign up to a policy of 'trade liberalisation', which means it has to open up its markets to goods from other countries, as well as reducing any help it gives to its own farmers.

So, after finally beginning to rebuild his life, cheap, subsidised imports may now stop Jusu selling his rice at the local markets. Alie Fornu, director of Christian Aid's partner, the Association for Rural Development, explains: 'The people of Sierra Leone want to be able to trade themselves out of poverty. But, because of unfair trade rules, thousands of Sierra Leonean rice farmers and their families now face a desperate future.'

Our response

1 Pray:

Use the seeds from the meditation as a reminder to pray. The seed could be kept in a pocket, wallet or some other place where you will see and touch it regularly. Let the seed remind you to pray for Jusu and Hawa over the coming weeks.

2 Act:

Christian Aid is part of the Trade Justice Movement, a coalition that campaigns alongside farmers like Jusu to bring justice to world trade. The Trade Justice Movement wants to give countries like Sierra Leone the right to protect their poor farmers. The 18 months between the summer of 2004 and the winter of 2005 will be a key time for the campaign. In this period, Britain will be president of both the EU and G8 group of nations. A number of trade justice events are

planned for the build-up to this. They begin with a gathering in Brighton on Sunday 26 September, to coincide with the Labour Party conference, and from 10 to 16 April 2005 we will join millions of others around the world in the Peoples' Week of Action for Trade Justice. Why not arrange for your group to get involved? To find out more, visit

www.christianaid.org.uk/campaign

3 Give:

The rice seeds that helped Jusu rebuild his life cost just £5/€7.50. Giving regularly is like planting seeds. It is an act of hope. We trust God that even the smallest amounts of money can change lives and communities.

To make a donation visit www.christianaid.org.uk/give or call 0845 7000 300.

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Christian Aid/Brenda Hayward

Trade justice campaigners call for an end to unfair trade rules