

Sabden Big Lenten Walk Reflections

“Fish will be very plentiful, for wherever the water goes it brings health, and life teems wherever the river flows.” Ezekiel 47:9

The prophet Ezekiel tells of a river that teems with life and causes fruitful trees to grow. Fish will be plentiful and the water will bring health to all.

Abundant fish are the dream for fishermen and their families in Liberia. If they have a good catch, they have enough to eat and sell so they can save for the future.

One major problem they faced was storage. Keeping fish fresh for sale is vital. A project that CAFOD supports provides solar freezers close by, free of charge. Before, fishing families had to pay to transport the fish to cold storage, eating into their profits.

The fishermen’s wives have been sharing what they have learnt with their husbands, so that there is less wastage on the boats. As Vivian explains:

“Because of the training I got from the project... I encourage Tekon to take a box fishing. He places the fish into the box. I put ice in there and he keeps them fresh there.

"Before the box, he might put the fish in the canoe – it might not be washed and have bacteria. We might have ten to fifteen fresh fish. They would be spoiled. They would smell and wouldn't be good. Currently, we hardly have any spoiled fish.”

Our hope is of a world that reflects Ezekiel’s vision, where food is plentiful, life-giving water flows, and all people can share in the gifts given to us by God.

Let us work together this Lent to make this vision a reality.

“Which is the greatest of all the commandments?” Mark 12:28

Jesus tells us that the first commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The next is to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Lent is a time for us to reset and reprioritise these two commandments in our lives. As we make space each day to reflect on God’s word, and to listen more attentively to what is being asked of us, we may also become more aware of others around us.

Loving God is not something that we keep just to ourselves, but is shown each day in all that we do and in how we treat others.

On this International Women’s Day, we think especially of all those women across the world who do just this. Guided by their love of God and love for their neighbour, they are building communities and creating change, so that our world better reflects the Kingdom of God.

Women like Zoila in Guatemala, who is working with other indigenous leaders to challenge the violence that many women in her community face. She is determined to see women and girls in her community live with dignity and hope.

“I have been supporting women who face violence from their husbands. I tell them I know what it’s like, as I’ve also suffered from violence. Through dialogue we have united families and saved many homes.”

“What we are fighting for are equal rights for young girls, boys and all adults. We need to respect and value one another.”

“I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?” Matthew 18:32-33

The king forgives his servant, cancels his debt and lets him go free. But the servant is not able to show the same compassion and mercy in his turn to the person who owes him money.

His heart has not been changed by the master's generosity. He has learned nothing as he relentlessly pursues the debt owed to him.

Every day we have the opportunity to break these cycles. We can choose to remember the mercy that has been shown us and forgive others in our turn. We can allow God's forgiveness and generosity to transform our hearts.

A Jubilee year falls in 2025. We will be called to reset and renew, to overturn the structures in our society that keep people poor and to build a fairer society where all can flourish.

Pope Francis sets out his desires in a letter, saying: “The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire.”

He urges us to “refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity.”

The Pope also calls for a “symphony of prayer” ahead of 2025. Let us add our prayers then to that symphony, that we may look toward a time of new beginnings with hope and with an openness to make changes.

“Now we are going to Jerusalem and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death.” Matthew 20:18

Jesus knows that when he gets to Jerusalem, he will be arrested and executed, and tries to warn the disciples.

The same happens to Jeremiah. He has upset powerful people by proclaiming God’s message, and they concoct a plan to bring him down.

Throughout the ages, rich and powerful people have shown they will do anything to hold onto what they believe is theirs. Even if deep down they know their opponent is right.

In the Brazilian Amazon, land rights are a matter of life and death. It’s all too common for powerful individuals to claim public land to which they have no legal right, displacing communities and driving deforestation.

Wanda is part of a community of farmers struggling to reclaim public land that has been stolen. They face threats, intimidation and terrifying violence.

“I woke up the children,” Wanda recounts. “We were running and screaming. I threw a blanket over the children and I crept underneath. We hid and waited. At one point, I peered out and saw the bullets flying.”

She continues, “They were burning everything. We’re still traumatised. There’s a lot of suffering.”

The day after this violence, the community leader gathered everyone together and asked if anyone wanted to give up. No one did.

As Wanda says, “It’s not in vain, the struggle. If one falls, ten will stand up.”

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Matthew 5:44

How much better a place the world would be if we could all find it in our hearts to do this.

We know how hard it is to love the person who has wronged us, even in our own minor grievances. In our pain, we sometimes lash out, and so the cycle continues.

It takes courage for long entrenched enemies to treat each other with love and build towards the trust which is needed to start bringing about an end to conflict and division.

CAFOD has worked for many years in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory with partners who are Christian, Jewish, Muslim and secular. We call for an immediate end to all violence, for a permanent ceasefire, and a just and lasting peace.

As Pope Francis has said, “The Middle East does not need war but peace, a peace built on justice, dialogue and the courage of fraternity.”

Let us raise our voices and have an influence where we can, demanding people in power work for peace throughout our world.

And let us pray for all who are persecuted and that those who inflict violence on others may turn instead to peace.