

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

A TISSUE OF TRUTH

A Christmas reflection by Peter Shaw, Tear Times Editor.

Arriving in the Rohingya camps in February this year, it was hard to get a sense of scale. We knew that more than 700,000 people had fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar since August 2017. But to picture it, we needed to get higher.

I noticed a three-story wooden structure with a ladder leading to the top. Tearfund's partner staff told us it was an elephant-spotting tower. The camps are situated in a wildlife sanctuary south of Cox's Bazar.

As we climbed to the top, the view was astonishing. Settlements sprawled as far as we could see, covering hills in the distance – and much further beyond.

Floods of tears

Over the course of two days I met dozens of people desperate to tell me their harrowing stories. Every person had seen or experienced extreme violence: friends and family massacred and burnt.

But the memory of one lady in particular has stayed with me throughout this year. Her name is Nur and her husband was killed in front of her.

The story flooded out of Nur as she spoke, and so did her tears. I instinctively pulled a tissue out of my pocket and handed it to her.

But she continued to wipe away at her face with her hands. She held onto the clean tissue as we went outside to take photos of the living conditions in the camp. And I realised that Nur had taken the tissue as a gift. It was a commodity – too precious to waste on tears. You can see it in her hands, in the photo above.

Gesture gift

Nur told me she had no way of earning money to support her six children. She was reliant on the help of our partners and other organisations. No wonder that anything – even my tissue – was gratefully received and treasured.

I hope you will join me in reflecting this Christmas about the gifts we give and receive. For people like Nur, even the smallest gift can be of untold value. But how often do we miss the blessings that we have because our lives are so full?

At Christmas we should particularly remember God's Son who was also a refugee fleeing violence. Jesus became poor to offer us the precious gift of life.

Let's pray

- Lift up the hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals living in harsh conditions in Bangladesh.
- Ask God to bring peace and an end to the killing of Rohingya people in Myanmar. They are being offered the opportunity to return, but don't feel safe to do so.
- Spend some time reflecting on the gifts you give and receive over Christmas. Ask God to help you be more generous towards people who have so little.

A NOTE FROM...

'Thank you for praying for Rohingya refugees like Nur. As winter sets in, please pray specifically that families will be protected from the cold weather, and that we'll be able to provide those in most need with supplies such as warm clothes.'

James Baidaya, Bangladesh Emergency Response Team

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY COUNTRIES: UK

To mark 50 years of Tearfund, we're sharing about 50 countries where we've worked, celebrating God's provision and power to transform, and praying for each of these nations. For this, the final week, we've come home to the UK.

You won't find Tearfund at work in the UK in the same way as would in, say, Zimbabwe. However, one thing is at the heart of our work wherever we are in the world – the local church.

In Zimbabwe, for example, the church is supporting the nation's million-plus orphans, teaching revolutionary new agricultural techniques and much more besides.

Whereas in the UK, it is churches like yours who are praying, giving and volunteering. You are also advocating for social change – whether it's for less food waste or action on climate change.

Without their, and your, support, nothing you've read about in all the other '50 Years...' stories would have been possible.

There is one other project, based in the UK, that I'd love share with you. It was founded by Tearfund staff and it operates from our offices. It tackles an issue that lots of us would rather not think about, but that needs our attention...

Restored revolution

Restored is an international Christian alliance to end violence against women. It operates to answer two questions: 'Where is the Church?' and 'Where are the men?' when it comes to ending violence against women.

In the UK, Restored focuses on ending domestic abuse and equipping churches to identify and best respond to it.

Although Restored works with churches and Christians to achieve this, many churches are often doing little to prevent it. It's a shameful secret within so many churches, and Restored is helping people to break the silence.

According to Restored co-founder Mandy Marshall, while some churches haven't always been particularly helpful to women who have faced such abuse, she believes Jesus remains good news for them:

'Often, churches are ill equipped and have no idea how to treat survivors of abuse, and so they [survivors] end up ostracized or unsupported,' she says. 'However, we have seen again and again that their faith has sustained them through everything. And through the supportive and compassionate Christian network at Restored, they have found somewhere they are understood and where they can recover.'

This recovery has been expressed beautifully by members of the network through some moving and inspirational poems, like the one below:

Butterfly

*It melted and slept
Struggled and wept
Then fought for beauty
One drop of sacred
blood at a time.
Beautiful thing,
How did you emerge
from such a gruesome
scene?*

It is the hope of Mandy and everybody at Restored that more and more women find this kind of healing and transformation, after all they have faced.

Please pray:

- Thank God for the remarkable support that churches across the UK offer to Tearfund. Ask that more churches will be inspired and motivated to partner with us.

- Thank God and pray for the work of the Restored network, providing support for those who have faced domestic violence.
- Pray that more and more churches in the UK and worldwide will become better prepared to respond to violence against women within their churches or communities.

EXPECT REDEMPTION

This reflection from Bishop Graham Tomlin is shared from our current daily Advent email series. We were so encouraged by it that we wanted to share it with all of our One Voice readers too. We're sorry if you've read it before, but you never know, you might notice something new the second time of reading...

'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.' (Romans 8:22–24)

When you are acutely aware of the suffering of the world, it is easy to lose heart at the magnitude of the world's problems. How do you keep going?

In Romans chapter 8, Paul masterfully recasts everything. Seen with the eyes of faith, the sufferings of a broken world are like the labour pains of a woman – pain that is acute and distressing, yet has something wonderful at its conclusion. The signs of light we occasionally see, the acts of goodness, the small successes, are not the brief flickering of a candle, but the first glimmers of the dawn of a new day. They are the fruits of the Spirit who is bringing the whole world to its fulfilment in the new creation.

At its heart, the Christian faith is a declaration of hope that we can expect ultimate victory – despite losses we may experience along the way. A victory that doesn't depend on our efforts and skill, but on the sure promise of the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington

Please pray

Father, we thank and praise you for the promise of hope that we celebrate at Christmas. Please help us to be people who notice the small glimmers of light in the world and remind us to pray for your redeeming kingdom to come here on earth. Amen

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Since the Indonesian tsunami in September, our partners and networks have been hard at work among the communities worst affected, helping prevent the spread of disease, providing

food and shelter, and more. Pray for those still recovering, and for our partners there this Christmas.



Pray for refugees in Ethiopia facing malnutrition. Most of Ethiopia's refugee camps are at full capacity with refugees from neighbouring countries like South Sudan. Pray that food and resources will reach those in need and restore them to full health.



Continue to pray for families in Democratic Republic of Congo who have lost loved ones as a result of Ebola, especially for children who have been impacted by the virus. Please pray that the spread of Ebola will be stopped and for healing and recovery for those affected.