

Morningside
13-05-2018

P, P and P

A doctor friend of mine, with a lifetime's experience of operating theatres told me recently about a medical recipe for success. When the bleeding from a surgical operation will not stop, he told me, what you need is the three "P"s. the first P you need is Pressure. When a wound is deep and blood is flowing or spurting from it, firm, direct pressure is essential to reduce the flow of blood.

This is Christian Aid Week. When they announced the theme for this year, *Stand Together this Christian Aid Week* Christian Aid declared *Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of their dignity and lets injustice thrive. But together, this Christian Aid Week (13-19 May), we have the power to transform lives.* The first P for Christian Aid week is pressure.

Fifty years ago the United Nations set a target for countries to spend 0.7 per cent of its national income on overseas aid. It took a long time for the UK to reach that target. When David Cameron was Prime Minister the 0.7% target was achieved; and it has been maintained under Mrs May. We are one of a only a small number of countries to achieve that target and I am very proud of that. But there is pressure. the target is always under pressure. There are loud voices saying that we can't afford it; that there are problems enough at home to spend money on, that if others don't meet the target we should not bother either. I hope you will resist that pressure. I hope you will resist it in your own mind and heart; I hope you will resist it when you have an opportunity to talk to politicians. That we are determined to remember the needs of others ought to be for us a badge of honour.

There is a particular pressure on charities this year, especially on oversea aid charities. After the sexual abuse scandal of Oxfam workers in Haiti hit the headlines, Oxfam lost 7000 regular donors. Many people have been saying that they will not support overseas aid charities because of scandals like this. Christian Aid has been open: in the last ten years they have dismissed two workers and they have disciplined two more for similar behavior. It puts pressure on charitable giving., You have to decide whether, in the light of what has been discovered, the needs of the world's poor are better served by our withholding our money, or by our increasing our giving.

All this pressure on aid. But in the operating theatre, let us remember, pressure is a good thing. It is pressure that stops the bleeding. So, in this Christian Aid week, let there be pressure. Let there be pressure as we see and hear terrible things about famine and war and refugees on the news. Let there be pressure on our pockets. Let there be pressure on our consciences. Let there be pressure on our volunteering time. For it is that kind of pressure which stops the bleeding. It is that pressure which begins to heal the wounds of those in most desperate need.

The second "P" in the operating theatre, my friend told me, is patience. The treatment of a bleeding wound needs pressure. And it needs patience. If the pressure does not stop the bleeding keep pressing. Don't panic. Be patient.

So in Christian Aid Week the needs are so urgent, so overwhelming, so immediate, that it is easy to give up in despair. Don't panic. Patience is important.

For example, I used to be minister of the church in George Street next to the George Hotel. If that church is known for anything it is known for the Christian Aid Book Sale: if you have never been before then give yourself a treat. Each day this week you will find one hundred thousand books and 500 volunteers - sellers and counters and bakers and lifters -

all raising money for Christian Aid.. When it began, you could never have guessed how it would grow. It began with a table on the pavement outside the front door of the church. That first Christian Aid Book Sale at St Andrew's and St George's raised £140. Since then it has raised over £2 million. What patience has been needed. What fruit that patience has borne.

It would be shocking for us comfortable, well-nourished people to tell the world's poor they must be patient. Their situation is urgent, desperate. No wonder they cry out in rage and bitterness at the injustice and oppression under which they live their lives. We dare not say to them "Be patient". That is not what I mean. What I mean is that patience is what we need, you and I. Patience is what we need when it seems to make so little difference: all the words and work for Christian Aid, all the collecting envelopes and coffee mornings and Book Sales – and how little difference it seems to make. So for us, have patience.

Remember a little table of books in George Street and what has grown from it. Or think of this. Last month I was in St Giles' Cathedral for an event remembering the contribution of Lady Marion Fraser to Christian Aid. Some of you may remember her from the days when she lived a few hundred yards from this church. Her son, Douglas Fraser, the Business Editor of BBC Scotland, told us this remarkable statistic. *44% of the world population lived in absolute poverty in 1981. Since then, the share of poor people in the world has declined very fast—in fact, faster than ever before in world history. In 32 years, the share of people living in extreme poverty was divided by 4, reaching levels below 11% in 2013. Although the World Bank estimates for 2017 are not yet available, the projections suggest that the incidence of extreme poverty has fallen below 10% for that year.* Let us not weary in well-doing.

The third "P" in the operating theatre, my friend told me, is prayer. The treatment of a bleeding wound needs pressure. And it needs patience.

And still it bleeds: and it needs prayer. Now my friend is a jokey sort of chap so I'm not sure if he was teasing me; but he is also an elder of the Church of Scotland, so I think he maybe wasn't joking at all. Whether he was or not, I'm certainly not joking when I say that Christian Aid needs prayer. That the needs of the world's poor need prayer; that the efforts of Christian Aid volunteers need prayer; and that the consciences of us all need prayer.

We heard earlier a strange story from the Book of Acts. A short time after Easter the risen Jesus leaves the company of the disciples and seems to be taken up into heaven. It is not an easy story to understand. But there is no difficulty in understanding the verse which comes at the end of the story *They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer.* They had walked with Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem, but that was not enough. They had known the great miracle of Easter Day; but that was not enough. They had heard the risen Jesus, after Easter, saying to them *You will receive power,* but that was not enough. They still had to pray. They still devoted themselves constantly to prayer. I wish I could say the same of myself. I'm sure you wish you could say the same. Could we go one step beyond mumbling the Lord's Prayer, though that is important? Could we go another step beyond *God bless the grandchildren,* though that is important? Could you, throughout this Christian Aid Week, give yourself time to be quiet, to be quiet with God who loves you and wants you to be near him, and to pray for the world's hungry?

Yes, you could. Whatever else you do in Christian Aid Week, do that.

Here is a prayer that I learned from Christian Aid. It makes an excellent grace to say before a good meal. *God, to those who have hunger, give bread; and to those who have bread, give the hunger for justice.*

