**14/3/21 Mothering Sunday. A talk with contributions from our partners at Tearfund. (Ruth 1-4 & Luke 2:33-35) Rev Steve Lees**

On this Mothering Sunday; ‘Thank God for Mother’s!’ That phrase ‘Thank God’ can often be used sarcastically and a little disrespectfully, but today I mean it in the most positive sense; ‘Thank God for Mother’s!’ It’s a good day to take time to say thank you to your own mum but also to praise God for mums in our community, & in our country particularly during this difficult pandemic. It’s mum’s who’ve shouldered the major part of home schooling; who’ve had to come up with all sorts of creative ways to support their families at this time. Mum’s who have experienced joy but also difficulty. Thank God for Mother’s around the world, some of whom who are raising families in extreme circumstances and poverty…In our service today, we’ll learn about one of these mothers who Tearfund support in Lebanon.

Tearfund are a Christian development charity whom St James support financially. Each year we try to have a guest speaker from Tearfund who tell us what the charity are doing and how we can help & pray. This year, as with so many other things, it’s different! A woman called Lisa has sent us a video which will be on our online worship, where we also have a short film about Tearfund’s work in Lebanon. (if you can access the internet, you can watch it by following this link: <https://www.tearfund.org/-/media/files/main-site/home-is/church-resources/tamams-story.mp4>)

First of all, let me share some shocking figures with you. At the moment there are roughly 70 million refugees and displaced people around the world…people without a home! We’ve been in lockdown, perhaps feeling trapped in our homes! but to be without a home at all; what a tragedy! In Lebanon, today there are roughly 1.5 million Syrian refugees in camps and makeshift accommodation. People like Tamam. Tamam and her family had a home in the Syrian countryside where they reared goats; cultivated fruit, vegetables and herbs; and had an olive grove. The conflict came without warning. Armed groups entered her village and cut off the electricity and running water. Crops and animals were lost, and food became scarce. Then, one day, Tamam’s husband died too. With no other option, she took her children and they ran for their lives. A few precious photographs are all that remains of their previous life. ‘My husband, the garden, my home... they're all gone, but I remain,’ says Tamam. Tamam’s home is now two rooms in a slum in Lebanon. It is cramped and dangerous. Life is hard, but there are fragments of hope. Tearfund’s local partner, Tahaddi Education Center, is in the heart of the settlement. They provide schooling, trauma counselling and healthcare, as well as business training. Tamam was invited to join their sewing programme. Her new skills now provide her with an income, and she can feed her family. Tamam plans to open a workshop to teach others. Now she dreams of the better life she is building for her children. But there are millions of people like Tamam whose lives have been shattered by conflict.

With so much need in our world It is tempting to throw up our hands and say, ‘There’s nothing we can do!’ Lisa, in her talk repeats a phrase which resonates with what we’ve been learning in our Stay Alert to the Spirit series: ‘We cannot do everything but we must do something!’ Tearfund work through Christian organisations and churches ‘on the ground’! They work with people regardless of faith. In our Old Testament reading today we see Ruth an outsider, displaced from her home, who finds help and finds family through Naomi and Boaz. Maybe we can see Tamam as a modern-day Ruth, a displaced person in great need. Through Tearfund and local partners she is finding help and family. On this Mothering Sunday, perhaps you could make a donation (no matter how small…or large) to help mother’s like Tamam to get help to support their family.

If you can donate online, follow this link: tearfund.org/get-involved/donate.

If you are not online or prefer to give another way, why not put a donation in an envelope and label it ‘Tearfund donation’ and pass it to the Vicar or your pastoral carer. Please make cheques payable to: Bolton St James, PCC. We will make sure they are forwarded to Tearfund in one lump sum.

We can only imagine the privilege that Mary had of raising Jesus as her son. Let alone can we imagine the pain she went on to suffer; ‘…a sword will pierce your soul too’ as Simeon prophesied to Mary. (Luke 2:35). Motherhood comes with blessings but also with struggles. Pray with me for Mum’s like Tamam in her joys & struggles, and for mums in our parish in their joys & struggles that they will turn to this same Jesus, who is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven interceding for us. (Romans 8:34) May they turn to Jesus and find help and grace.

Perhaps you are part of the answer to these prayers as we Stay Alert to the Spirit. ‘We can’t do everything but we must do something’. God loves to involve his church in the joy of seeing His Kingdom Come through prayers answered. Amen. Happy Mothering Sunday!

Remember Sunday 14th March 6.30pm, join the zoom meeting led by Rev Gordon Dey, as he leads us; ‘What next for St James?’

He asks us to ponder these questions in advance (please think about them even if you can’t come along):

1. What new things have you learnt or re-discovered about Jesus during Stay Alert?

2. What new convictions/challenges have you gained during Stay Alert?

3. What things are already taking place at St James that are an effective response to Stay Alert?

**4. Going Forward:**  What one thing are you thinking that you and/or your family might do personally in response to Stay Alert?

**5. Going Forward:** What one thing would you like St James Church to do in response to Stay Alert?

**6. Going Forward:**What one thing would you like the Church of England to do in response to Stay Alert?

**Some notices**: St James will re-open for public worship from Good Friday 2nd April 2pm for an hour at the cross. On Easter Sunday 4th April we will celebrate with Holy Communion in church at 10.30am….and then each Sunday following morning service at 10.30 (Communion on 1st Sunday of month). We will continue to offer an online service each Sunday for the time-being.

More details of Easter events coming soon…including Messy Church on Zoom from 10.30am Good Friday… A physical ‘Stations of the Cross’ to be installed in the church garden.