

SERMON 10th May 2026 (Christian Aid Week 2026)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Speak to us now as you have spoken to us throughout the ages. On this glorious Easter, reveal yourself and your will for our lives, that we might live as your Easter people. Amen.

Like shopping in a supermarket, the choice before him was many, varied, and packaged in such a way to encourage interest at the very least, if not deep desire. Novelty was also a big selling point.

That was Paul in Athens. Paul was in Athens in the year 50 on his second journey around the Mediterranean preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. He often went first to Synagogues where people sometimes welcomed his message, but were often hostile to it. His reception in Thessalonica had been so hostile that he had had to go to Athens to escape threats to his life.

While there, waiting for his friends Timothy and Silas to catch up with him, Paul was safe because Athens was a very cosmopolitan city. There were many, many different ideas to discuss, and many, many different gods to worship, and the Athenians were always interested in novelty, not surprisingly. After all, we know from just visiting a supermarket in our free-market economy that choice breeds innovation and novelty, and novelty and innovation in turn breed more choice.

That is why, what each of us here ate for breakfast this morning, for example, was not likely to be the same, and even where it was so, in general, it could have been any number of variations from Frosties to Coco Pops, from Weetabix to Shredded Wheat.

This diversity of choice comes with its problems. There are opportunities for scams – our choices are often influenced more by the quality of the packaging than the taste of the contents. And there are opportunities for exploitation – not all our choices are healthy for us, and because few are happy with porridge every morning, it's easy to sell sugar dressed up as tasty breakfast.

That is what Paul saw when he was in Athens; many products, lots of good packaging, and a focus on an easy sell over what was fulfilling and life changing. There were idols of gods made of silver and gold, and there were ideas about god that made promises, which couldn't be fulfilled.

What Paul brought to Athens was not just another deity to compete in this marketplace of gods, but a faith borne out by his experience of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection that God was universal. God was not a God of choice. God was not God for those who had special knowledge, or for those who were born into a specific ethnicity or chose a specific nationalism, or who were beset by specific concerns. If God was for anybody, then God was for everybody.

This faith that Paul expressed in Athens of God as universal, would sweep away those ideas that gods should only be associated with narrow nationalisms, or local concerns, or our individual problems, hopes and fears, or the specific ideas and imaginings of our own minds.

That is why on this Sunday of the year when we celebrate the work of Christian Aid, and remember our neighbours around the world whom we are called to love, we are expressing our faith in God who, because He, as Paul said, 'created the world and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth, [and who] does not live in shrines made by men ... the universal giver of life [who] created every race ... of one stock, to inhabit the whole earth's surface,'¹ is God for everyone, everywhere.

Just as, when we shop in a supermarket it is easy to imagine that the biggest brands with the most popular products are the best and most important, and that small brands, which are less popular are of less importance, so, even when we worship a universal God who is for everyone, everywhere it is nevertheless tempting to imagine that God is most concerned with what appears to us to be the world's biggest problems, most important people, and with what is proving to be of most interest; that which is most popular.

But, the God of Jesus Christ didn't identify himself with just the world's biggest problems or the world's most important people. Through Christ's suffering, death and rising again, the God of creation identified himself with the last and the least. That is why we are called this morning to pay attention to people like Fridah and Belinda, whom we hear about this morning in our service, whose lives are supported by projects that Christian Aid support, like Imarisha Kilimo. God created the world and all that is in it, but in Jesus Christ, God is equally concerned about the cone gardens in Fridah and Belinda's small patches of ground, which help them to feed their families, survive, and flourish.

In the supermarket of news that we consume every day, it is easy to be pay the most attention to that which is displayed in shiny packaging, and that which is offered to us as the biggest and the most important story of the day. But, this morning, our concern is with that which is not in the most prominent place on the supermarket shelf, grabbing our attention. It is with individual people whom we have never heard of, in places where we pay no attention to, who are struggling with issues that we have no experience of.

But, just as Paul told the Athenians that God iwas amongst them, and they just couldn't see him, the truth is God is there in Dagoretti in Kenya, and through the living body of the resurrected Christ expressed by Christian Aid's faith transformed into action, God is bringing good news to people who would otherwise be ignored or forgotten about.

This morning, let us put our faith into action by turning away from what is most likely to grab our attention in the marketplace of life, and let us pay attention to the God of all creation who pays attention to the poorest and most ignored people of the world.

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.

¹ Acts 17: 24 - 26