

Today we are thinking about Vulindlela Guardians, our partner charity in Zimbabwe which raises money for primary school fees for AIDS orphans and children living in acute poverty. But I want to start with some words of the war-time German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

“you may not sing Gregorian chant unless you have first stood up for the Jews”

It is not a literal statement of course. But he is saying you have no right to worship God with a great display of piety, unless you are living out that worship in solidarity with the weak and persecuted. In German terms, in the 30s, that meant you have no right to a fancy liturgy unless you are living out the consequences of your faith in saving the Jews from Nazi persecution and death.

It makes the connection between faith, worship and justice, very compellingly. The grander your liturgical tradition, the greater the obligation to struggle for justice.

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For us, our worship here - all this beauty of the building, the quality and effort that goes into our music, the liturgy and the beautiful vestments and silverware - all is nothing, asserts Bonhoeffer, if we don't also fight against injustice and want. If we don't, the worship is meaningless, it is a sham.

In today's Gospel we hear how the 12 apostles were sent out into the countryside in active ministry to make a change to people's lives in bearing the

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Good News. We can't show up here on a Sunday and offer worship to God unless we too are out there in the world living out our gospel.

Which brings us back to Vulindlela Guardians. VG was set up to combat children dropping out of Primary School. In a country with high rates of HIV infection; full-blown, acute economic problems and high rates of unemployment, it can be impossible for relatives to find the money for school fees. There is no free primary education. Grandparents struggling to bring up grandchildren face a particularly hard time.

These are reports of 2 girls from the people who run VG which Elena and Hannah are going to read for us.

ELENA

ALICIA NCUBE stays with her grandmother, Kettie Ncube, mother to Alicia's father who died a year ago, leaving this child with a sick mother. Alicia is 7 years and is at Insukamini Primary School. Alicia has a caring grandmother who looks after her, and cares so much for her, and her mother, and she says thanks to Putney churches and Rotary. Lord Bless you all !

HANNAH

PAMELA NGWENYA is a 7 year old girl and is doing Grade 2 at Insukamini Primary School and lives with her grandmother at B89 Njube. She is a tiny little girl – her father died leaving her with her mother and grandmother. Her mother is not working, and they had no money to pay fees, and her

grandmother had to approach Vulindlela Guardians to ask for assistance, and they felt for this old lady, and decided to help this little girl. Now Pamela goes to school like any other child. Thanks to Putney churches and Rotary. Carol, Sandy and Robert and Patricia

Jeremy Donne, whom many of you will know, has recently visited Zimbabwe and met with the organisers of VG, themselves friends of Chantry and Stephen Westwell who come from Zimbabwe and, living now in Putney, worship at All Saints. Jeremy can't be with us to-day which is a pity, but reports that VG is run extremely effectively (that the calibre of volunteers is high including David Coltart, a former Education Minister), so every penny that is raised in this country goes straight towards school fees. Importantly there is no scope for corruption.

And he also says, that although the country has been chaotic (as we all know) for some years, the educational system is a good one, and once money has been invested in primary education, children stand a good chance in life. A further complication though has been the introduction of fees for the exam necessary to move to secondary school, so more money needs to be raised for that.

The children have next to nothing. I remember a couple of years ago, the organisers in Zimbabwe, knowing that children who are hungry don't learn so well as those who are nourished, introduced a feeding plan. Just ONE proper meal a week. Without VG these children have nothing, and no chance of education, so the support we give them is VITAL

Here, rightly, parents take their children's education seriously. Those of us who have children, can you begin to imagine what it is like NOT to be able to send your child to school? Not to give them that basic start in life? Here's a final account of one of the children, this time of a boy;

To be read by a boy

SIYABONGA KUNENI is a boy aged 8 and at Helemu Primary School. His parents are both sick, and are disabled as they had a long illness. Siyabonga says he feels for his grandmother, as she is the breadwinner, and she is old. Sometimes, they go for days without food, and this child is so thin. He is always quiet, and isolates himself, and if you ask him 'why?' he tells you that he is hungry. He told me that it was taking a long time for him to grow up, so he could look after his parents and grandmother, then he started to cry. He does well at school, and he is so thankful to Vulindlela for paying his school fees.

So often when we look at the injustice of the world, it is easy to hand-wring and say what can we do about such enormous problems? But here we can, indeed, do something simple, cost effective that will make a vast difference to some of the neediest children in the world. Jeremy says that he was struck by the optimism and hopefulness amongst the young professionals he was working. Mugabe does not have long left and his wife is ill and will not take over from him. There is a sense that, within the government, pragmatism will have to prevail and conditions in the country will improve, including employment. This makes education all the more important.

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Can you help? There will be more information at the notices but basically we are trying to pay for school fees for one hundred children this year. Since it only costs £80 a year to send a child to primary school, that is £8,000 across the parish. But whatever we can raise, whatever you can contribute, however small, all will make a difference and make such a difference.

Remember Bonhoeffer:

“you may not sing Gregorian chant unless you have first stood up for the Jews”

The CoE had a less than glowing record of aid to Jewish refugees before and during the last war. This is something where we really can make a difference and practice our Gospel not just in church of a Sunday, but in the world.