

## SERMON

*Sheran Harper, president of the Mothers' Union*

It is by God's grace that I greet you in Christian love, the kind of love we must have one for another. This morning, I am here at St. Sidwell's church in Guyana and I understand there are only two of these churches, the other one being St. Sidwell's in Exeter. Both of these churches have similar histories and the legend of St. Sidwell speaks of Sidwella, a devout Christian girl in the eighth century who used to leave the walled city of Exeter to take food to the villages as they worked in the fields.

Sadly, she was beheaded while kneeling in prayer. It was in this church 33 years ago that I became a Mothers' Union member. And since then I have been blessed with an avenue through which I could journey, and share God's love, and the Good News of salvation. And I am sure this is not only my story, but the story of so many who serve God in other areas in the Anglican Communion. There seems to be something about being a Christian that not only compels us to serve the needy and vulnerable, but it also encourages us to connect with God through His word. It is in His word that we find true peace and comfort in a world of uncertainty. Archbishop Justin, on the verge of the second wave said, "this is harder than the first wave".

Let's be calm, compassionate, and courageous. In our reading today from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of the day of the Lord, the last days, a period of time and seasons in which he says, as Christians we do not have to be afraid because we have the knowledge of the things that will happen. So we should be in a state of preparedness, living with expectation in calm, yet being alert, clothed with the breastplate of hope and love. He says we should encourage one another and build each other up. I really find this text meaningful, because it gives us every reason to share the Good News while extending God's love to others.

So can I ask, how are we extending this love while we wait on the day of the Lord? In Britain and Ireland, MU members have been sharing love in so many ways during the pandemic, including supporting key workers, popping information in letter boxes, engaging in phone circles and doorstep chats, and encouraging walk and talk groups. In Uganda, through broadcasts, MU members are raising the awareness of gender-based violence. And this is working very well in increasing the confidence of communities to report perpetrators. This resulted in Mothers' Union collaborating with the police to rescue 25 adolescent girls who were trafficked.

They are now receiving psycho-social support from the members there. Sadly, this is only one of many stories. And as we approach the period of the international campaign of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, it is my fervent prayer that the entire Anglican Communion would join me in the call for an end to all forms of violence against women and girls.

We must act as Jesus would by giving a voice to the voiceless. By standing together online on December 5th, the global day of action to boldly declare, no more one in three, no more must one in three women globally face any form of abuse. Gender-based violence is an injustice. It must be condemned and removed from God's world. While we support two Christian movements, namely 'Thursdays in Black' and 'Side by Side' in this arena, we continue to pray for divine intervention as together we actively challenge the structures and systems that prevent women and girls from participating fully in society.

And at the same time, fully involved men and boys in redefining just and equal gender relationships. Sometimes our world makes faithfulness challenging, but Jesus empowers us to be faithful, courageous and purposeful in our spiritual walk. May today be a new day of committing afresh to extending God's love wherever we are. May God's grace be sufficient while we wait for the day of the Lord.

Amen.