**Stowe Church, Sunday July 30th 2023** Readings Ps 78:1-7; Mark 9 33-37 + 10:13-16

**CHIT and Children**

I am sure we were all horrified to see Orla Guerin’s news report from the Yemen recently.

In any conflict, famine or war situation it is the children who are among the most vulnerable. From our readings we can see what God thinks about children Ps 78 ‘ do not hide the deeds of God from them’; they are welcomed by Jesus; we need to become child like in our acceptance of and trust in God.

In the 1980/90s when George Kent was first fundraising for Indian children via Goodwill, you could find hundreds of children sleeping in railway stations; many children had suffered from polio and remained disabled, there were few state welfare benefits for the Dalit section of the population. Children’s homes were set up, with the help of Goodwill, in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh to take in abandoned and homeless children.

He got to know Rajasekhara Babu, who with his wife, Hepsy, had taken in such children to their own young family and gradually had managed to build a permanent Children’s Home in Bapatla and later in Nidamarru. George retired, but kept in touch.

Babu and Hepsy had been members of the Lutheran Church in Chirala and had even run the Young people’s work there. They are devoted Christians and try to appoint likeminded staff in the Homes.

In 2004 Goodwill ceased to support the Bapatla Homes and Babu contacted George in 2005 asking for help. That briefly is how CHIT was born.

Our readings today were chosen to show how God cares about children. Psalm 78 is a long Psalm, but it begins with the importance of passing on Godly teaching to the next generation*. Vv1-7* . . I guess there are people who sigh and say “they won’t listen” “it’s an uphill battle” “too many distractions”. I think it is hard in our quasi sophisticated and rather cynical society in the West. But remember it is not just about us. The church is growing all over the world . There are faithful families sharing the Gospel with their children and grandchildren and praying for them to come to faith in Jesus. We can only do likewise.

CHIT’s official statement of purpose covers relief of poverty, sickness and distress and the advancement of education among children and ends with all the work it supports is in “accordance with Christian principles”. Our funds come from the gifts of our supporters, the Gift Aid claimed on them, plus some fundraising events. We have been amazed and thrilled to see God answer prayer in funding. At the moment, the home needs a new water tower and an electric transformer to improve supply. These capital items need to be paid for in addition to the regular monthly maintenance payments of about £10,000.

We are dipping into our modest reserves and praying. Last week our Treasurer received a substantial legacy to CHIT from 2 supporters who had stopped making regular donations but had left money to CHIT in their wills. We constantly need to return to a simple faith in God’s provision for us.

Which brings us to the Mark reading… “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name does not welcome me, but the one who sent me’ God identifies with these young children. In Mark 10 ‘the kingdom of God belongs to such as these’; and the idea that all need to come to faith in God in the manner of a child. In other words in acceptance and trust. **Child like not childish**. (eg the toddler on the stairs throwing himself into my arms). It does not mean ‘never questioning’ – children are good at asking questions it is part of their way of learning about the world. Real enquiry should lead to a search and conversation and the same is true of our growth as Christians. But sometimes we just cannot understand a situation… the childish reaction is to reject everything. The child like reaction is ‘ I do not understand, but I know that you are there, God and I will trust you to bring meaning’.

At present the Homes in India are caring for 200 children and teenagers. Some total orphans, some one parent or very poor families. Under the present regime in India they are restricted in their Christian practice: certainly no overt evangelism is permitted in the Homes. This does not stop them holding an annual Bible School in the Elizabeth Barrie school which is very popular. They are permitted to meet for Sunday worship (at present) and they hold evening prayers everyday. In addition 25 HIV children living at home locally are given monthly support of extra food and a little money. During the Covid lockdown when all the children were sent ‘home’, Babu became aware of the needs of the nearby Yanadi people and arranged food and clothing distribution much of it with the help of our care for the while their parents are working as ‘coolies’ on the land.

I mentioned the Elizabeth Barrie school where all the children are educated. It is thriving under the skills of the Head Mistress, Shekeena. This has become an English Medium school and is in great demand among the local population as well. CHIT no longer has total financial responsibility for the school. The Supporters in the USA carry most of this, but CHIT does contribute when needed.

We have truly seen God at work and the help is still needed. There may be fewer children sleeping in railway stations; polio has almost been eradicated, but HIV, alcoholism and some employment uncertainty still means there is a need for the help we seek to give.

200 children may be a tiny contribution towards meeting the need within India’s 1.3billion population, but we believe that each child is precious to God . *Pauline Stanton-Saringer*