

GREENING THE DESERT

in Sudan

Practical
ACTION



Practical Action is delighted to offer these worship resources to your church family.

It is a chance to focus on fellowship with some of the poorest people across the globe, and the ways they can transform their lives. The ideas are suitable for all ages, and can be adapted for particular audiences. You can find more information to accompany this particular service, and additional service ideas, and materials, at www.practicalaction.org/churchservices.

Note that this service is especially suitable for festivals.



Welcome and explanation

Welcome the congregation and explain that this is a service with a special focus.

As Christians, we want to help the world's poorest people, and we can draw strength and inspiration from the charity Practical Action, which works with communities in Africa, South America, and Asia.

Practical Action is a charity that helps men and women develop ingenious, lasting and locally owned solutions for the problems they face, including hunger and poverty.

They work in North Darfur, Sudan, where drought is destroying lives. The harshening climate makes growing food and raising animals ever harder for smallholder farmers - which, in this region, is practically everyone.

Women like Samiya, pictured above, go hungry as the encroaching desert eats her fields, and ruins her crops. In the last seven years, she has only had one good harvest, to feed her children.

Yet the situation is not hopeless, and Samiya isn't giving up. With others from her village, and with help from Practical Action, she is transforming her few acres through crop rotation, improving soil quality, rebuilding reservoirs, rehabilitating grasslands, and planting trees.

Together, they are turning North Darfur's deserts into fertile green farmland – and our church can celebrate this great victory, and can ask God to help transform lives, in our own community, and in the world's poorest places.

Songs for this service

Now thank we all our God – Martin Rinkart

Good King Wenceslas – John Mason Neale

It came upon a midnight clear - Edmund Sears

Jerusalem – William Blake

Whenever God Shines His Light – Van Morrison

Suitable Readings

Exodus 16, 1-18

John 21, 1-13

The Other Story of the Flood
(see page 4)

Talk notes

When our tables are groaning with rich food, and we have more than we can eat, it's hard to imagine the desperation that accompanies deep, relentless hunger. In the Exodus reading, the Israelites in Exodus were lost and hungry in the desert, and God fed them with quails, and with manna – an omer each, we are told.

Ask people to guess how much an omer is (in dry weight, it's around 1.5 Kg). You can put the guesses on a score-board!

We don't know what manna was, but it is described as sweet, bread-like flakes. All the Israelites had to do was pick it off the ground each day, and yet they still complained.

Miraculous manna was, as far as we know, a one-time special, just for Moses' people. To ease their hunger today, people living on the desert's margins have to be clever and resourceful. And Samiya, whose story we heard at the start of the service, is a real farming entrepreneur.

Talk about how Samiya is helping herself.

God is still in the picture for Samiya: He doesn't just help grumbling Israelites. God also helps those who help themselves. Some use that saying to justify their own greed. Instead, Samiya and her fellow villagers are helping everyone by their actions, even those not yet born. If they succeed, the desert will turn green. Their cheerful determination to make a better world is just as miraculous as manna, and God will surely be on every step of their journey.

As an activity, you can make garlands of popcorn ('manna'), and dried fruit. These can be hung in gardens, and every time you see a bird on it, you can say a prayer for Samiya and her fellow farmers.

The reading from John also illustrates how we can help God, by helping ourselves. Christ stood, a stranger to his closest friends, on the shore of the lake of Galilee. Seven of his disciples had fished all day, with no luck. Christ asked them to re-cast their nets, and they did so, even though it must have felt pretty pointless. Yet they were willing to try again, and not to give up. You can imagine how surprised they were when the nets came up, full of fish!

In the same way, Samiya and her fellow villagers will have days when they reap nothing, despite all their hard work, and when they go hungry. As Christians, we know the power of prayer, and we can help now, by praying that God helps them overcome hardship.

As an activity, you can hang a net somewhere in the church, and people can write a prayer for Samiya and her fellow villagers on a cardboard 'fish', and tie it to the net. At festival times, you could leave the net up, to act as a meditation and prayer point.

Finally, in the Other Story of the Flood (overleaf), we are reminded that God helps us by giving us the right tools – character, friends, experience, courage – to manage life's problems. We don't need miraculous manna: just like the villagers in North Darfur, we can make our future better than our past using the gifts that God has provided.

Playing 'Whenever God Shines His Light' by Van Morrison, is a good way to end the talk. As they listen to the words, ask people to think of a moment when God shined His light on them.

What you can do to help Samiya

- Make or buy plain popcorn (you can add food colouring if you make your own). Ask people (or supervise children) to thread it onto cotton with a needle. You can add dried fruit if you like. Then hang these edible garlands outside, and pray for Samiya and her fellow desert farmers when you watch birds feed on this 'manna'.
- Weave a fishing-net from wool or string, and hang it in the church. Make fish-shaped cards, and put a hole in each one. Invite people to write a prayer for Samiya's village on a one of the cards, and tie it to the net.
- Make and sell your own 'church manna' (cakes and biscuits), and donate the proceeds to Practical Action, for its work all over the world.

What Samiya is doing to help herself

- Attending Practical Action's village workshops for smallholder farmers, to learn new growing techniques.
- Creating 'crescent gardens' which are series of raised arc beds in the hard, parched earth. These stop rain from running off the surface, and slow water evaporation.
- Rotating crops, to enrich the soil and discourage pests.
- Using drought-tolerant seeds.
- Planting trees, to hold back the encroaching desert.

The Other Story of the Flood

A fellow was stuck on his rooftop in a flood. He was praying to God for help.

Soon a man in a rowboat came by and the fellow shouted to the man on the roof, *“Jump in, I can save you.”*

The stranded fellow shouted back, *“No, it’s OK, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me.”*

So the rowboat went on. Then a motorboat came by. The woman in the motorboat shouted, *“Jump in, I can save you.”*

To this the stranded man said, *“No thanks, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith.”*

So the motorboat went on.

Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, *“Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety.”*

To this the stranded man again replied, *“No thanks, I’m praying to God and he is going to save me. I have faith.”*

So the helicopter reluctantly flew away.

Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to Heaven, where he met God. He angrily exclaimed: *“I had faith in you but you didn’t save me, you let me drown!”*

And God replied, *“I sent you a rowboat and a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?”*



Mother Teresa's Prayer

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest people may deceive you. Be honest anyway.

What you spend years building, others could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them, anyway.



Thank you for sharing Practical Action's service ideas with your church.

We are an international charity which uses ingenious ideas to challenge poverty in some of the world's poorest countries. We help men and women to find practical solutions to the hardships they face, without damaging the world.



For more service topics and resources, visit
www.practicalaction.org/churchservices