 Nigist Honja and her friend with her cow. Credit: Anteneh Tadele

2024 Harvest Pack

I HAVE A DREAM

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tearfund

Ireland

PREPARATION

- Please pray that God will use your talk to bless both the people who hear you and those who are in poverty around the world.
- Familiarise yourself with the video that accompanies this talk available on the Tearfund Ireland website if you choose to use it.
- Arrange for someone to read the Bible passage for you before you speak.



BIBLE PASSAGE

25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

28 Because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.”

29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

31 “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”



SERMON OUTLINE

Attention

More than 50 years ago American civil rights leader, Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. delivered one of the most famous speeches in history, popularly referred to as “I have a Dream”.

“I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.” Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

“I have a Dream”, one of the most famous speeches in the English language. Do you have a dream? When we have a dream, it is often for the complete transformation of whatever we are deeply concerned about.

With the way things are in Ireland today, does the possibility of transformation seem a long way off?

The communities Tearfund Ireland work with around the world have hopes and dreams too but so many are locked into situations where they can see no way of achieving them.

Empathy

Nigist Honja had hopes and dreams, but after her husband died, with four children to provide for, she says herself that her life became ‘very miserable’. She felt hopeless and her confidence was at rock bottom.

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa, with a population of about

110 million people. Mulugeta Dejanu, Tearfund Ireland's Regional Manager tells us that the majority of the population survive on less than €2 a day and that approximately 10% of the population experience food insecurity and malnutrition on a regular basis. Women just like Nigist Honja, women with hopes and dreams, women who can see no way of transforming their situation.

Insight on the passage

The passage we read earlier is about a woman who had hopes and dreams, just like us, just like Nigist, but her physical condition, which the Bible tells us caused her to bleed for 12 years destroyed her life.

Such a condition over more than a decade would have sapped her of her energy, however there was another dimension in the culture of the time that brought more challenges with it. Women suffering from a bleeding disorder were not allowed to mix freely with others, they were not allowed to visit the temple and worship with others. They were meant to stay at home, to be isolated until their condition improved.

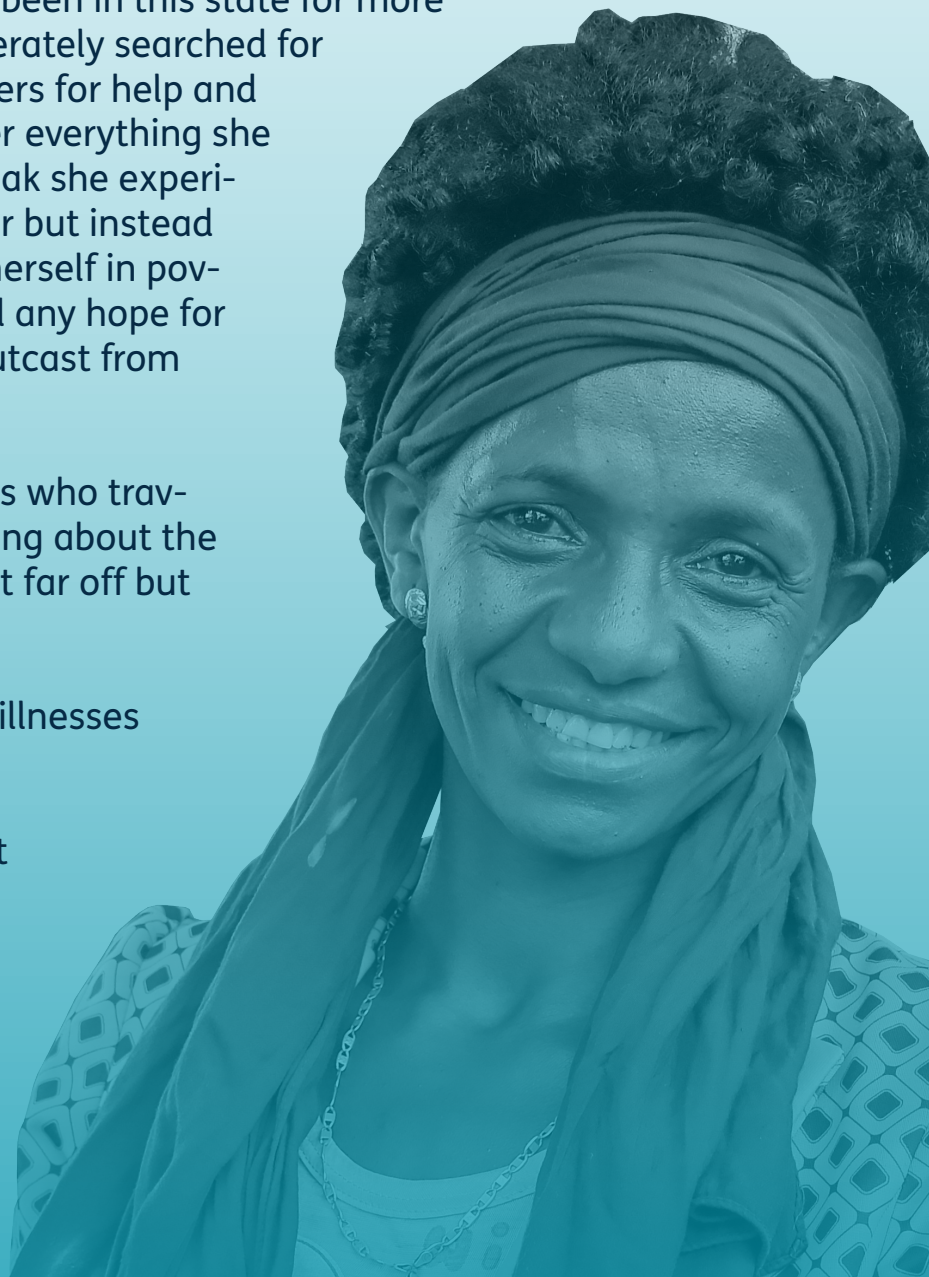
We are told that this woman had been in this state for more than 12 years, that she had desperately searched for a cure by visiting doctors and others for help and that her medical care had cost her everything she had. I can't imagine the heartbreak she experienced when she did not get better but instead became more unwell and found herself in poverty too. Her illness had shattered any hope for the future. It had left her as an outcast from society.

Then she heard about Jesus, Jesus who travelled about towns and cities sharing about the Kingdom of God, that God was not far off but that he had come near.

Jesus who healed people of their illnesses and set people free;

Jesus who mixed with the outcast and those who no one else would mix with;

Jesus who listened to people's stories and asked them what their hopes and dreams were;



She took a risk

When the woman saw the transformation happening in other people's lives, new hope began to rise in her heart. So she took a risk.

She left her home and went out into the crowd to where Jesus was.

Because of all she had faced, she tried to stay hidden, if someone in the crowd recognised her, she could be in serious trouble for mingling in public. But somehow, she was convinced that by simply touching Jesus clothes she would be healed. No one would ever need to know, no one would be offended at her presence, Jesus could focus on the important work he was doing. All she needed to do was to get close enough in the chaotic crowd to touch his clothes.

So she touched Jesus' clothes – immediately she knew in herself that she had been made completely well. But Jesus also knew something – although he did not see or feel the woman touching his clothes because of the crowd. He knew that someone had touched him with faith in their hearts to be healed and that they had been healed.

Jesus wanted to know who had touched him. His disciples thought it was a strange request as there was an enormous crowd pushing all around to get near him and to get his attention.



Jesus listened to her story

The woman came forward trembling, so afraid that she would be in trouble for approaching Jesus, so worn down from so many years of being an outcast. Instead, Jesus wanted to know her story. Although she lacked confidence and was afraid, she felt she could tell him her story and how she had come to touch his clothes. Jesus still listens to our stories today.

Restoration and Transformation

Jesus' response had several parts. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

1. Jesus called her 'daughter'. By calling her daughter he was accepting her, reinstating and confirming her as a member of the community, restoring her identity as a child of God. She would be able to hold her head up high and mingle with others in the market place and in the place of worship.
2. Jesus acknowledged that the woman had agency, that she had dignity and worth, that she had something to offer as she sought her healing. He commended her faith, she stepped out and although she was nervous, she bravely took a risk.



By bringing the small gift of faith that she had, she received the healing power of God for her condition.

3. Jesus said 'Go in peace' – the holistic, whole life peace of God that affects every part of life, the Shalom of God. This would now be the hallmark of her life.

4. Jesus said 'be freed from your suffering' – he marked the start of a transformation in her life, free from the past and free to move forward in the peace of God.

In Ethiopia, more than 80 million people live on less than €2 a day, 10 million people regularly struggle to feed themselves and their families but through the Self Help Group movement more than 1.4 million people, women like Nigist have had their lives transformed and have been lifted out of poverty over the past 20 years.

By taking a risk, starting small, women come together in groups to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. The Self Help Group movement is not just a short term project, it is a growing, long term movement, transforming lives year in and year out.

In the Bible passage, Jesus was keen to listen to the woman's story. Let's listen one woman's story ourselves now, Nigist Honja, who has seen her whole life transformed, since she joined a Self Help Group.

Show Video of Nigist Honja story here

The woman in the story could have felt there is no point in going to Jesus for healing after all her disappointments, so too, when Nigist heard about opportunities for to join a Self Help Group, she felt there was no point in saving just 50c. But like the woman, in the story, hope of a change began to rise for Nigist. She took the risk of joining a group and saving some of the little money she had.

Like the woman in the story whose past life had been devastated by illness, tragedy and isolation, Nigist has seen her hopes and dreams for the future restored. She can now feed her family and put her children through school. Her confidence and joy have been restored. She can hold her head up high in the community.

Nigist believes that her dreams can be fulfilled.

Nigist's life, like that of more than 1.4 million people in Ethiopia today, has been completely transformed by participating in a Tearfund Ireland Self Help Group. We are hoping to establish 195 more groups in the coming year.

Options

1. Nigist felt that the small amount she had to save would be useless, it was a risk. Would you be able to partner with Tearfund Ireland and give a small amount regularly? To come alongside women like Nigist as they seek to lift themselves out of poverty?

- Do you feel like you have nothing to contribute? Even a small amount given regularly can make a difference.
- €21 a month could establish a new Self Help Group for 15-20 women

2. Jesus listened to people's stories. Tearfund Ireland love to give updates about how we are seeing lives transformed through the work being supported by you and churches across Ireland. Will you sign up for updates from Tearfund Ireland to hear people's stories and to share them with your church and other people you know? We are always looking for people who will share Tearfund Ireland updates with their churches, please speak to me afterwards about becoming a Tearfund Ireland link where you are.

3. Can you give a few minutes a day, or week to pray with us? Would you share prayer points in your church groups? We believe that prayer transforms lives and situations. Sign up for our monthly prayer bulletin.



You

- What about you? Do you have a dream? Have you let some of your dreams go? Perhaps God is nudging you to let hope rise afresh in your heart and to go to him once again about the situations you are longing to see transformed. Ask God to give you faith, courage and insight for your next step.
- Please continue to pray for Tearfund Ireland and our partners that we will be agents of transformation by the power of his Holy Spirit wherever we work.

Let Us Pray

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you are the God who restores lives and transforms communities.

We thank you that you hear our prayers and see us just as we are.

We thank you for the thousands of women like Nigist who have taken a risk and seen their hopes and dreams restored through Tearfund Ireland Self Help Groups.

We pray that you will bless the new Self Help Groups that will be set up this year.

May more and more women across Ethiopia know restored hope and freedom from poverty.

We pray for Tearfund Ireland church partners facing multiple challenges across the world. May they be a beacon of light, bringing transformation to the hearts and lives of people in their communities.

And we come to you with our hopes and dreams. We hand them over to you again and ask you to show us our next step. Make us good listeners; make us restorers of hope; make us beacons of light in our communities.

St Paul encourages us “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

We ask you to nudge us to remember our brothers and sisters facing the challenges of poverty, changing climate and conflict across the world. Help us to listen to their stories, pray for them and support initiatives to see people lifted out of poverty for good.

In Christ’s name we ask,

Amen