

“Then I’ll Do It Myself”, said The Little Red Hen, And She Did

Here is the saddest fact about poverty – it really doesn’t have to be this way. For less than one per cent of the income of the wealthy countries each year, the worst effects of poverty could be gone. People would have enough to eat. Basic services like health and education would be available to all. Fewer babies would die and pandemic diseases could be brought under control. It really wouldn’t cost very much. According to the LA Times, if wealthy countries gave even one per cent of their income each year there would be more than enough to meet all of these needs. Wealthy countries would barely even miss one per cent of their income! The solution sounds so simple, why don’t we do it?

What’s stopping us? . . . Let me tell you, it is fear of what people will think. What’s stopping us from standing up against poverty? What’s stopping us from standing up against discrimination? It is these words that run through our minds, “What will they think?” Well, who cares what they think!

We listen to news reports and we watch what is going on in our world and we see terrorism, wars, landmines, injustice, racism and poverty. We cannot pretend we are ignorant. We know that one in five of the world’s people live on less than \$1 a day. And we are not happy about it. Documentaries, about communities coping with deprivation and ill health, burn into our brains. We hate seeing film of starving children and we cannot wipe away the image of the flies bothering their swollen eyes, or the pathetically small blob of unappetizing gruel in their dirty bowls. We ache to do something about it. We yearn to change things.

What’s stopping us? . . . Let me tell you, it is fear that the problem is too big. What’s stopping us from changing the balance between rich and poor? What’s stopping us from stamping out poverty? It is these words that run through our minds, “It is just too complex. Perhaps it just cannot be fixed.” Well, it can so be fixed and we can do it!

In 2000, the United Nations agreed in its Millennium Development Goals to halve the number of people living in poverty by 2015. But just three years later, the world was already falling behind in its targets. Rich and poor countries agreed to work together to alleviate poverty. Rich countries agreed to give half of a percent of their incomes. Poor countries agreed to ensure the money was spent wisely and accountably. But agreeing to make a commitment and then actually honouring it are two very different things. Actually less than one quarter of a percent of national incomes was given and the political changes, needed in poor countries so that the money could be distributed well, didn’t happen.

What’s stopping us? . . . Let me tell you, it is the distraction of less important things; our busy lives and family issues. What’s stopping us from changing our world into the one we want? What’s stopping us from getting the aid money to the people who need it? It is these words that run through our minds, “This seems urgent. That can wait.” We need to prioritize the important above the urgent!

I've never been to a third world country. I've never seen starving children. I don't know anyone who has died from drinking dirty water. But I have read the story of the Little Red Hen. Nobody else wanted to plant the seed or harvest or grind or cook it, so the Little Red Hen did it herself. She had the vision to see what could be. I have learnt that sometimes to get something done I just have to believe that it is achievable and start doing it by myself. I believe it is possible to alleviate poverty. I can see that we can change our world. So I'm doing the Forty Hour Famine this year. I feel like the Little Red Hen but I might encourage other students to get involved and make a difference, too.