

Some Lenten thoughts during Fairtrade Fortnight.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." Luke 10 v 25-28

We are now in Fairtrade Fortnight. It is sure to have a lower profile this year as so many events, such as our annual coffee morning and baking competition, are not able to take place. There are still plenty of on-line things to read and take part in. I thought I would take a fresh look at the 10 Principles of Fair Trade. Looking at them one by one, there is nothing new, nothing controversial. As Christians, we can see that each is bible based. Why, then does Fairtrade feature so low on people's priorities when shopping? Yes, things may cost a little more but this is not going to the retailers and middlemen, it is to give the producers a fair wage, and the other benefits listed below. Fairtrade is not charity, but is to enable our neighbours in the developing world not to live in luxury but to lift them out of poverty, feed, cloth and educate their children, have a roof over their heads and basic health care. Nearly everyone recognises the Fairtrade symbol. By buying goods bearing the symbol you can be assured that the principles of Fairtrade are adhered to, your money is going to where you want it to go.

1 - OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED PRODUCERS

Poverty reduction through trade forms a key part of the organisation's aims. The organisation supports marginalised small producers, whether these are independent family businesses, or grouped in associations or co-operatives. It seeks to enable them to move from income insecurity and poverty to economic self-sufficiency and ownership.

Jesus always championed the poor and disadvantaged. He came to "Bring Good News to the Poor"

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2: 14 – 17

Denying workers a fair wage for their labours means they cannot put food on the table, clothe and educate their children

2 - TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The organisation is transparent in its management and commercial relations. It is accountable to all its stakeholders and respects the sensitivity and confidentiality of commercial information supplied.

3 - FAIR TRADE PRINCIPLES

The organisation trades with concern for the social, economic and environmental well-being of marginalised small producers and does not maximise profit at their expense. It is responsible and professional in meeting its commitments in a timely manner. Suppliers

respect contracts and deliver products on time and to the desired quality and specifications.

Proverbs 29 v 7 tells us *“The righteous know the rights of the poor, the wicked have no such understanding”*

4 - FAIR PAYMENT

A fair payment is one that has been mutually negotiated and agreed by all through on-going dialogue and participation, which provides fair pay to the producers and can also be sustained by the market, taking into account the principle of equal pay for equal work by women and men. The aim is always the payment of a Local Living Wage.

A Local Living Wage is a remuneration received for a standard working week (no more than 48 hours) by a Worker in a particular place, sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the Worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, healthcare, transport, clothing, and other essential needs, including provision for unexpected events.

Throughout the old and new testaments there are numerous references to a fair days pay for a fair days work.

5 - ENSURING NO CHILD LABOUR AND FORCED LABOUR

The organisation adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and national/local law on the employment of children. The organisation ensures that there is no forced labour in its workforce and/or members or homeworkers.

Children have a fundamental right to education. They cannot learn if they are exhausted by working long hours. Still on tea plantations owned by multi-national companies, women are forced to take their children to work with them in order to reach their unrealistic quotas.

6 - COMMITMENT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION, GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, AND FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The organisation does not discriminate in hiring, remuneration, access to training, promotion, termination or retirement based on race, caste, national origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, union membership, political affiliation, HIV/AIDS status or age.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3v28

7 - ENSURING GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS

The organisation provides a safe and healthy working environment for employees and/or members. It complies, at a minimum, with national and local laws and ILO conventions on health and safety.

In this country “Health and Safety” is often the butt of jokes. On cocoa plantations in West Africa it is no joke. Young children are sent up the cacao trees, carrying machetes far too big for them to handle safely, to cut down the cocoa pods. When the hard pods land they are gathered by other children who then sit cross legged on the ground, and using the same machetes crack them open to reveal the beans that the cocoa is produced from.

Accidents are common, children are maimed. This was highlighted in a Channel 4 documentary, still available on YouTube, several years ago.

8 - PROVIDING CAPACITY BUILDING

The organisation seeks to increase positive developmental impacts for small, marginalised producers through Fair Trade.

9 - PROMOTING FAIR TRADE

The organisation raises awareness of the aim of Fair Trade and of the need for greater justice in world trade through Fair Trade.

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow's cause," Isaiah 1:17

10 - RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Care for the environment is the Fairtrade Foundation's main focus for Fairtrade Fortnight this year.

God made us custodians of this wonderful world, with plenty for everyone. How we have misused this trust and caused so much damage is finally being recognised by most world governments. Fair trade and care for the environment have always gone hand in hand. Around forty years ago Traidcraft produced the first kitchen rolls and toilet rolls using recycled paper. Fairtrade clothing has always been made with fabrics produced in a non-polluting way and the manufacturing processes have avoided techniques which caused land and water pollution.

What will happen without action-

- 50% less land suitable for coffee growth across the world by 2050
- Increased weather extremes in India to reduce tea production – and increase diseases that destroy crops
- Wine production in South Africa to fall by 50%, 40% in Chile
- Many current cocoa growing regions in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire will become too hot to grow cocoa by 2050
- Higher altitude areas, currently valuable forested, biodiverse areas, will likely be cleared to become farms.

Organisations which produce Fair Trade products maximise the use of raw materials from sustainably managed sources in their ranges, buying locally when possible. They use production technologies that seek to reduce energy consumption and where possible use renewable energy technologies that minimise greenhouse gas emissions. They seek to minimise the impact of their waste stream on the environment. Fair Trade agricultural commodity producers minimise their environmental impacts, by using organic or low pesticide use production methods wherever possible.

Buyers and importers of Fair Trade products give priority to buying products made from raw materials that originate from sustainably managed sources and have the least overall impact on the environment.

All organisations use recycled or easily biodegradable materials for packing to the extent possible, and goods are dispatched by sea wherever possible.

So, continuing the much loved and well known passage from Luke that we began with:-

The lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Let us pray

We are sorry and ashamed that there are still poor people among us. Like You, we long for a world where no one goes without their basic needs or suffers the humiliation of being poor. We pray for those who do not care about the poor, soften their hearts, Lord. Speak to the conscience of world leaders and influencers. May they see beyond their own interests. Bless those who seek to eradicate poverty. Bless their work and all they put their hands to. In the name of Jesus Christ, who is always with us. Amen

