

Ideas for worship

These ideas for worship, reflection and study on the theme of Fairtrade may be freely reproduced with acknowledgement of source, the Fairtrade Foundation, London.

Good news (Luke 4:18)

Jesus said: "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor."

There are more references in the Bible to responding to the poor than about prayer, atonement, or Jesus' resurrection. And it is the poorest people in the world who are suffering most at the hands of unfair trade. So what might 'good news' mean for them? The verse goes on to talk about liberation of captives, protecting the weak, and the coming of justice so that all can be included in God's Kingdom. Fairtrade has this aim at its heart – a just system which frees producers from exploitation, enabling them to lift themselves out of poverty.

A Prayer

Tilt the scales,
O God of the mustard seed:
That the poor shall see justice.

Share the feast,
O God of Eden's abundant garden:
That each crop may fetch a fair price.

Upset the tables,
O God of the upside-down Kingdom:
That the least can benefit from their trade.

Open our eyes,
O God of life in all its fullness:
That we may learn to walk the way of your son
tilting, sharing, upsetting this world

Not satisfied
until the products we bring to our table
Give a better deal, to all who hunger for one.

In His name, Amen.

Abundance (Proverbs 13:23)

"The fields of the poor may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away."

Bananas are the UK's most popular fruit, yet mostly grown on large plantations where chemical use is rife and workers often face dangerous conditions. Small family farms find it impossible to compete with their low prices, and many have abandoned their plots. But FAIRTRADE Mark bananas, which guarantee growers higher prices, are now available in some supermarkets.

Costa Rican banana grower Maynor Ugo Ugalde said: "It would be very difficult for us to survive, let alone prosper and plan for the future, without Fairtrade." Although Fairtrade is now bigger than ever

before, there are still thousands of producers who do not yet benefit. Increased awareness of the FAIRTRADE Mark could boost sales and bring a better deal to more people like Maynor.

For a stark warning to unscrupulous middlemen, see Amos 8:4-7.

Chocolate intercessions

These prayers for others and ourselves involve all of our senses. Cut up a variety of Fairtrade and 'ordinary' chocolate bars into bite-sized pieces, whilst still in their wrappers. You will need enough for every member of the congregation to have a piece. Begin the prayers by passing them round and inviting people to eat their chocolate, but save the wrapper.

Suggest that people pray with their palms open, as a symbol of being able to both give and receive, and releasing all that they cling to. Ask them to place the chocolate wrapper in their palm as a focus for their prayers. The phrases could be interspersed with the singing of a chant such as Ubi Caritas (Taizé) or Through our lives and by our prayers (Iona).

Let us pray:

We think of the people involved in the production of the chocolate which we can still taste. We pray for cocoa and sugar growers in Africa and the Caribbean, some of whom work in conditions near slavery, and others who face the insecurity of never knowing how much they will be paid for their next crop. We pray for justice for farming communities everywhere, and give thanks for the initiatives which support them, such as the FAIRTRADE Mark.

We pray for all those who work in factories throughout the world, manufacturing the goods that we take for granted, from Indian sweatshops to hi-tech plants in this country. Where people face lives of pitiful wages and long working hours, we ask for their liberation, and pray for their health and safety.

We pray for all those who import and sell the products we buy, that they will have a sense of their responsibilities. We ask that you grant them courage to take a stand against exploitation, and the wisdom to pay producers the true value of their work.

You could at this point add your own prayers for the church, places of war and tragedy, the local community, those who are ill or mourning, etc.

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that we will learn to shop responsibly. Open us to the full impact of our purchases, to the people behind the products. Make us better stewards of creation and more loyal servants of your Kingdom, where the weak are made strong; the strong, just; and the just, compassionate.

End by inviting people to keep the piece of wrapper in their purse or wallet for the following week, to remind them to put their prayers into action as they shop.

Freedom

Is this not the fast I require: to loose the fetters of injustice, to untie the knots of the yoke, and set free those who are oppressed?

Isaiah 58:6

Bible study and reflection: Shopping and sausages

Buying a product is a bit like eating a sausage – easy to enjoy, until you know what's gone into making it. We need to see what goes before and after our purchases: the producers, and the impact of our consumption.

Read 2 Samuel 23:13-17

At first this story from David's battle days may not seem to have much relevance to fair trade. But on closer study it is an example of making ethical choices. Although he so wanted to drink water from the well of Bethlehem, he refused it, because he knew the risks that had gone into fetching it far outweighed its value. He recognised the costs seen by the eyes of God, which were far greater than those implied by the simple vessel of water before him. We too need to see these costs, and make our choices with this wider perspective in mind. This includes asking moral questions such as:

- Does buying this product relate to my belief in justice for the poor? Before acting, Gandhi would ask himself, 'how will what I am about to do affect the weakest, most vulnerable person I know?'
- Will buying this product respect the integrity of creation, and our role as stewards of this earth for both God and future generations?
- Ultimately, will this product deny abundant life (see John 10:10b), not only to me, but to those involved in its production or consequences?

Some may object that Fairtrade products cost more, as indeed they often do. But the question then becomes: who pays the price if we don't? As the rich, in relative terms, Jesus reminds us that we have a responsibility: "where someone has been given much, much will be expected of him." (Luke 12:48b)

OTHER RESOURCES

- Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the world's poor (edited by Janet Morley), SPCK/Christian Aid.
- Wisdom is Calling (edited by Geoffrey Duncan), Canterbury Press – includes a section on fair trade.