

Thought for the Week

Thought for the Week is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Wednesday 24th February

Jeremiah 5.20-end

This week is the beginning of Fairtrade Fortnight. This means, astonishingly, that it is a year since we had a Fairtrade stall in Prebendal House after church one Sunday, set up by the 'Fair do's' shop team. We were hoping that someone would volunteer to run a stall like this once a month afterwards but of course all plans were put on hold as we went into lockdown. The Fair do's shop in Canton is open, by the way, as it sells food, and you can pre order your shopping there to pick up – a click and collect system.

There are also plenty of fairtrade items for sale in the supermarkets these days, if you look out for the logo on packets. Consumer power really works; the more these items are in demand, the more they will be stocked. Tea, coffee, chocolate, bananas, are everyday staples which are readily available with the fairtrade label and I try never to buy any of these which are not fairtrade.

Why does it matter? Well I'm sure you know that the Fairtrade label is about getting a better deal for the growers in the developing world, who typically work for wages you and I would not know how to live on. The workers are paid more and the communities gain from the Fairtrade premium to invest in their local area and improve life for everyone. It is a step towards a fairer world, and the more people buy these products, the bigger the step will be. There is plenty of information on the Fairtrade fortnight website, including I was delighted to find, a chocolate quiz. Chocolate is one thing I usually give up for Lent, so in my deprived state it was nice to at least think about chocolate for a while by taking the quiz! And I learnt a few things.

The website has several short videos interviewing people involved in fairtrade projects across the world, including coffee, bananas, olive oil and flowers; giving us a glimpse into their lives and what a difference the Fairtrade premium has made.

Jeremiah and the other prophets were outspoken in their criticism of social evils in their day. *They take away the goods of others...they have grown fat and sleek...they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.* Over and over again, the prophets railed against exploitation and oppression of others, and neglect of the needy and vulnerable; all the sacrifices and worship songs in the world would not make up for these abuses of humanity. What a field day Jeremiah could have now, with the inequalities of the contemporary world and the injustices of international trade! As people of faith this is not an optional extra, it is not a cranky part time hobby; it is an essential outworking of our faith in our daily lives that we use our purchasing power ethically; that we consider the effect of our shopping habits on the lives of others whom we depend on for our essentials and our treats.

The cocoa farmers of West Africa live in poverty and could never afford to taste a bar of chocolate; it would be for them an unimaginable luxury. Yet our chocolate consumption, on

average in the UK, means that the harvest of 11 cocoa trees a year are needed to provide enough cocoa for each of us. And that's for our chocolate treats.

Hmm. Better go and look for Fairtrade Easter eggs so I can enjoy that Easter treat with a clear conscience!

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get-involved/current-campaigns/fairtrade-fortnight/>

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*