

**Cathedral Address given by Mr Richard Stainer**  
**Sunday 12 March 2017**  
**10.00am Choral Eucharist – Fair Trade Fortnight**  
***Text: John 3:1-17***

***Check against delivery***

Today is the last day of Fairtrade Fortnight and I hope that you have all been gaining pounds by eating lots of delicious Divine chocolate and Traidcraft biscuits and washing them down with large mugs of Fairtrade tea and coffee or even the odd glass of Fairtrade wine. I certainly have. Yes, I know it's Lent, but I decided to make a real sacrifice and give up dieting for 40 days in order to consume more Fairtrade chocolate and wine. It hasn't been easy, but so far so good! The theme for this year's Fairtrade Fortnight has been 'It's time to put Fairtrade in your break', so I also hope you have been encouraging your workplace colleagues to use Fairtrade goods for their morning and afternoon tea and coffee breaks. But I wonder: if you have found they are not using Fairtrade goods, have you had the courage to ask them why they aren't? It takes quite a bit of courage to question others about what they are eating and drinking. It might also take a bit of courage for them to change what they eat or drink and try something new.

That is why I both admire Nicodemus and feel a bit sorry for him. Here he is, a Pharisee, an intelligent, well educated man, a member of the Jewish ruling council, who wants to know more about Jesus and understand his teaching. Unlike many Pharisees he is not afraid to question his beliefs and to change his ideas in the light of new evidence. However he is clearly worried what others will think and so he comes to Jesus at night to put his questions. Furthermore, Jesus is also quite sharp with him. "You call yourself a teacher, but you don't understand what I'm saying?" Ouch, that must have hurt a bit. I wonder how many of us would have had the courage of Nicodemus to question Jesus and to accept that our understanding of what he said was less than perfect. That's why I admire him and the fact that later, on Nicodemus found the courage to stand up for Jesus when the other Pharisees would have had him arrested.

So what was Jesus saying? In a nutshell that we have to be born twice, once from our mother's womb and then again, a spiritual birth through the Holy Spirit. We have to look to Jesus to heal us if we are to be saved. It is summed

up in that wonderful verse 16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. So, we know that if we believe in Jesus we shall have eternal life. The Nicodemus story reminds us of another occasion when Jesus is questioned by another learned citizen. In Luke 10 26 Jesus, is asked by this expert in the law, "What must I do to inherit eternal life". Jesus asks him what he thinks and the man replies "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and mind and Love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus approves of this, "Do this and you will live." He then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question "who is my neighbour". At the very end Jesus asks, "Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers". The expert in the law replies, "The one who showed him mercy" to which Jesus says, "Go and do likewise".

There it is; so simply put. If we are to gain the kingdom of heaven we must believe in God and we must love our neighbour, and our neighbour is anyone else no matter who they are, even the most despised in society. God has set us the pattern of true love by sending his Son to die for our salvation. What an amazing sacrifice! But if we are to enjoy eternal life we not only have to acknowledge that sacrifice but we have to spread the love that He showed around our imperfect world. As believers in Christ we have to show God's love in the way we interact with our neighbours and that may mean some sacrifice on our part. At the end is eternal life but as we often find love has a way of making our life better as we journey towards that final goal.

Buying Fairtrade goods is one way in which we can show our love for our neighbour and reflect back to them God's love for us. Whenever you buy a Fairtrade product you are giving a producer somewhere in the world a fair price for their hard work. This is not charity, it is justice and of course justice is a very Biblical concept. Often it is translated as righteousness, but it is justice that is being written about. Thus in Matthew 5, 6 we are told "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice". In Matthew 6. 33 the imperative is to "seek first the kingdom of God and God's justice".

So what does justice mean in terms of trade? Well it means tilting the trade rules in favour of those countries that lack the power and resources of the big trading nations. It is about paying producers a fair price; but Fairtrade goes a

little further. On top of that fair price the community gets a social premium which can be used to pay for schools, clinics, fresh water, sanitation and other things to benefit the village as a whole. In the last two years my wife and I have had the good fortune to visit Fairtrade producers in Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Ghana and we have seen for ourselves the difference a fair price for products makes to people's lives. We have been shown wells and maternity units that would not have been there but for people, like you, buying Fairtrade products. We have met people who talk with pride of their children doing well at the local school built because they are getting a fair price and a little extra for their cocoa beans. We visited a coffee co-operative in Nicaragua which is reinvesting its social premium in establishing a small scale tourist industry. They have been doing up their houses so that they can run home stays and increase their income in what is a very beautiful but remote area.

Often we have found that there are less obvious benefits. In particular Fairtrade encourages the protection of the local environment. Being able to walk up through the rainforest and see a two toed sloth casually hanging like a hairy handbag from a branch; standing under an oil palm as a poisonous green mamba slithers its way around the trunk testify to the way nature is worked with, rather than destroyed by intensive agricultural practices. When you buy your Fairtrade Ghanaian bananas from Sainsbury's you are not only enabling local people to have a decent wage and develop their skills, but you are also getting a banana free of the nasty chemicals that many large plantations use.

Another important aspect of Fairtrade is that not only is the price fair, it is consistent. Farmers know what the minimum price is that they will be getting for the next five years. If the world price goes above the Fairtrade price they will be paid the extra, but if the world price drops they know they will at least get the Fairtrade price. This allows farmers and producers to plan ahead. They know they can afford to send their children to school, or invest in new equipment. Reliability of income makes them feel secure, something many of us take for granted, not always recognising how important security is to our quality of life.

We have been struck on our travels by the number of amazing women we have met involved in Fairtrade. Women are often the driving force behind the co-operatives we have visited. They recognise the benefits for their families and

they are often the ones who drive forward the improvements in their communities. I think of Mary whom we met in Ghana. She worked for a co-operative called 'Global Mamas' producing batik. We spent a morning with her learning some of the skills. She had left school at 15 and had always wanted to make batik. She worked long hours in a supermarket saving as much as she could until she had enough to buy a piece of equipment. Bit by bit she acquired over 5 years all she needed to start a batik workshop. She is still working hard, but now she is producing 60 metres of cloth a day and is getting a fair price for it. Her workshop was little more than a shed in a slum, but the quality of her batik cloth was of the highest standard. She is now able to feed her family and send her children to school, so Fairtrade has made all the difference to her life.

So please, never think that buying Fairtrade doesn't make a difference, it does. We have seen it. 1.65 million farmers and producers are benefitting from Fairtrade in 74 countries around the world. Those people, your neighbours, are feeling your love for them whenever you buy one of their products. It really is that simple. Bury St Edmunds is now one of eight Fairtrade towns in Suffolk. This cathedral and many churches in the diocese are Fairtrade churches. The movement is growing and as the UK negotiates new trade deals in the years to come our government has the chance to make sure that they are fair for all concerned. Up to now trade deals have too often been one sided and unjust. It is up to us to ensure future deals are built on justice for all.

Let me finish with the story of a little American boy playing in the farmyard, where the family privy has been built over the farm midden or dung pit. In his play he pushes the privy accidentally into the midden and horrified by what he has done he rushes in doors and up to his bedroom. About half an hour later he hears his father coming up the stairs. Pa pushes open the bedroom door and says, 'Son did you push the privy into the midden?'

The son, trembling, says, 'No pa, it wasn't me.'

Pa comes up to him, and says, 'Son I want to tell you a story. Once there was a little boy just like you who chopped down a cherry tree in his garden and when his father asked him, 'Son did you chop down the cherry tree,' the boy replied, 'Father I cannot tell a lie, I did chop down the cherry tree' and that boy grew

up to be President of the United States, and his name was George Washington. Now I'm going to ask you again, did you push the privy into the midden?'

The boy looked his father in the eye and said, 'Father I cannot tell a lie. I did push the privy into the midden'. And his father gave him a belt that knocked him across the room. The boy whimpered, 'That's not fair. I bet George Washington's father didn't hit him.' To which the father replied, 'No son, but George Washington's father wasn't in the cherry tree'.

That little boy did not know who he was pushing into the midden, and arguably his father should not have punished him so severely. But we have no such excuse. We know who we are pushing into the midden, into the muck. Let us return to our reading from John. That final verse is so important. "For God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." So, what can we do as Christ's hands and feet to make our world a better place? How can we reflect our father's love for his creation? Perhaps by buying more Fairtrade products and so helping our neighbours around the world? For our father is a loving and just father, but he expects the same from us. Please, let us not disappoint him.

Richard Stainer, March 2017