

Sunday 7th March 2021

led by Fiona Green and Stuart Green

Walking through Lent
Open fields/agriculture

Good Morning everybody, my name is Liz and today I'm walking along the lanes above Hartington surrounded by fields.



I'll now read the reflection for today. On this third Sunday of Lent we see a rare glimpse of Jesus in a place where things are being sold. It might challenge us to think about the people on whose work we all depend. You don't need to own a business or be responsible for staff to feel challenged by this. For example, who grows the food we eat, how do we know they're treated fairly and paid a fair price. Where were our clothes made? Did their production or transport damage God's world? Considering these questions is just one way that we can follow the example of Jesus when he showed concern for those often ignored or forgotten by others.

Prayer:

Let's pray. Lord, there are often so many demands on our time, but we have paused in the busy-ness to spend time with you and with our sisters and brothers in faith. We pray for all those whose work contributes to our lives; that they will be treated fairly and with concern for their well-being. Help us to understand how the use of our money can help to change lives. Be with us now we pray. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come to the Lord
And offer praise.
Let your words be at one
with your love for the Lord.
Let your hearts be at one

Ashbourne Methodist Circuit 22/11

with his love for the world.
Let your souls be at one
With his purposes and his peace.

Opening Prayer

God of all creation, we praise you and give thanks for our world. We especially thank you for the amazing food and drink. The rich taste of chocolate. The bitterness of coffee. The sweetness of honey. The goodness of fruit and vegetables. The refreshment that comes from a cup of tea.

As we think of our world and all those people who help to produce food & drink, we also say sorry that we sometimes do not value their work properly and we fail to care for our planet. We buy what's best for us, and don't think about the impact on others.
Amen

Stuart Green and Clare
Sales play a memory game
on Zoom and then talk...



Clare: As you've seen there are lots of Fairtrade products. Fairtrade means that the producers get a guaranteed fair price for their work.

Stuart: and more than that, they also receive the Fairtrade Premium, which is an additional amount for them to invest in their local community. I watched a really interesting film about a company growing bananas in Ghana. They had invested a lot in education, including books for schoolchildren, education scholarships for higher education, building a science laboratory for the local school and a vocational training centre to offer new educational opportunities

Clare: Fairtrade also protects the workers and include environmental protection, something which is increasingly important.

Stuart: Of course, many people choose Fairtrade products, but it's particularly important for Christians. We believe in a God of justice and fairness. Throughout the Bible, we read messages encouraging us to treat others with respect and dignity. We wouldn't steal food from a shop, so why would we think it's OK to buy products which pay unfair prices to the growers? In the same way as God's people asked "how can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land", we can ask "how can we enjoy

the taste of our coffee if the growers aren't treated fairly". The theme of Fairtrade Fortnight this year is "Choose the world you want" and so I invite you to think about what sort of world you want – and ask yourself, is it a world of justice, fairness and respect?



Let us pray:

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.

HYMN: STF 78 Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
because of what the Lord has done for us;
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
because of what the Lord has done for us;

Give thanks.

Henry Smith (b. 1952)
© 1978 Integrity's Hosanna! Music

Old Testament reading:
Reading - Jeremiah 7:1-7

7 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: **2** "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message: "Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. **3** This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. **4** Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" **5** If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, **6** if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, **7** then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.

New Testament reading:
Reading - Mark 11:15-19



15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, **16** and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. **17** And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" **18** The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. **19** When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Time to reflect -

Taking a stand against the system isn't easy. Yet in our Gospel reading Jesus does exactly that.

Jesus and his disciples were amongst the throngs of people who were congregating at the Temple in Jerusalem to prepare for the great festival of Passover.

And when Jesus arrived at the temple – the holiest place on earth, where God was even believed to dwell – and seems to be horrified at the buying and selling that's going on there.

Jesus quotes Jeremiah and calls the whole thing a robbers' den.

He overturns the market stalls and stops people bringing their goods into the Temple courtyard.

It's one of those rare moments when we see Jesus full of anger.

The people of the time might have been perplexed by his actions because actually, this trading was part of how the Temple functioned.

You needed to take a sacrifice and it needed to be perfect... without mark or injury. Pilgrims gathered from across the nation and frankly you really couldn't stick a dove or two in your luggage and expect to get it to Jerusalem in any sort of fit state to be sacrificed.



So, the traders were part of the whole deal. You could set off for the Temple, knowing that you'd be able to buy what you needed when you got there. The traders seem to have had a monopoly and we know that prices tend to be a bit higher in such situations. I'm sure I remember a school trip to London in 1980 when at a tourist hotspot a teacher said, 'Let's have an ice cream'... but when she saw the prices we decided that we didn't want one after all!

A good spot in the Temple forecourt was probably quite a nice little earner!

More than that though, it was an important part of meeting the demands of holiness and of pleasing God.

Jesus seems to find the unfairness of the trade offensive, but is he also saying something about holiness?

Is he saying that holiness is more than going through a ritual that starts in this outer courtyard? In our terms, is it about more than making sure that you're in your 'Sunday best' for church?

Are we being reminded that preparation doesn't start with the external things, but rather with the dawning wonder of the soul's need and desire to strive towards God?

Holiness is more than a place and it's more than a ritual, however helpful those two things might be in helping us to focus on God.

Jesus seems so often to be influenced by the prophets who - like Jeremiah in our first reading - speak of God's concern for those outside of well-to-do society. You'll find similar concern in Micah or Amos too, for example. Jeremiah's words are not unusual – they are a reflection of God's ongoing bias towards the poor and oppressed in society.

Jeremiah shows God putting a few conditions into the mix of holiness, and his relationship with his people. And those conditions are about the conduct of society and the individual within it.

To quote Jeremiah, the relationship with God needs to encompass acting justly with one another and refusing to take any part in oppression of the most vulnerable in society.

With regard to holiness, we are often encouraged to be more like Jesus – to model ourselves on Jesus in our obedience, in our humility, in our kindness, our prayer... the list could go on!

Yet it strikes me that there is also this strand of disruption of society's norms. This strand of saying that in God's Kingdom, priorities are rather different – that into the relationship of 'God and me' I need to welcome others for whom God has concern.

We see it here in the Temple. But we also see it threaded throughout Jesus's ministry. His words and actions do more than hint at what seems to be a profound and passionate politics of reversal.

This is the man who heals the people others ignore or won't touch. He is the one who will speak to foreign women, who will crouch down beside the beggar in the gutter, who will say: no, let the children approach me. The people who are scorned by society are welcomed by Jesus and by implication into the Kingdom. Just think of the parable of the banquet where it is the people with precarious lives deep in poverty who are treated as the honoured guests. The politics of reversal indeed.

Taking a stand against the system isn't easy. It certainly earned Jesus more than a few enemies.

But here's the thing:

If this is how Jesus went about things, then what are the implications for our Christian journey?

How are we to interact with this strand of disruption of norms?

We can certainly find examples of people whose social conscience springs from their faith, from their relationship with God. We've all heard of William Wilberforce the anti-slavery campaigner. After a conversion experience and an initial focus on his own spirituality, he felt an overwhelming need to put his relationship with God at the heart of his public life. He began to side with God on the great social issues of the day. Using his influence, he whittled away at then-accepted norms of enslaving other human beings.

That's all very well, we might say, but he was wealthy and had influence. Times were different.

Yes, they were, but oppression is still oppression.

We can still find ourselves lining up with God's concern for the oppressed. I read recently of a retired Methodist Minister, Rev Enid Gordon. Her particular call to social justice was on behalf of the people of Yemen, of all victims of the arms trade.

Was it just that she didn't like these things?

No. She anchored her concern firmly in the context of her relationship with God. She called the trade 'against God's will' and said that protesting against it was more in line with God's will.

Agree with her or not, the love of God and the need to line up with his love for the vulnerable was at the heart of her actions.

You could say that for her, she was trying to be more like Jesus.

In the Temple and in his earlier ministry, Jesus doesn't just turn the tables over - he turns the tables full stop.

He gives value to the unvalued, welcome to the unwelcomed and a place to the displaced.

What would you like to disrupt? What tables would you like to turn?



I don't ask the question lightly. Few of us feel comfortable disrupting accepted norms. It can make us feel very vulnerable.

We don't have to turn the tables over - we just perhaps need to be ready to turn the tables.

Ready to use love as the basis for our interactions rather than self-interest.

Yes, of course this makes me think of the times I've failed - really failed - to do these things. Humanity with all its pain and desperate needs is not always a comfortable or easy thing to be a part of.

Recently there's been a barn owl flying over the field by our garden in the early evening. It's beautiful. But of course, it is hunting. It reminds me that whilst this is part of nature, it doesn't have to be part of our human nature.

We do not need to be the hunters or the hunted, exploiters or the exploited, the powerful or the powerless.

Perhaps after all, turning the tables can be about levelling them.

It's hearing the voices and the lives of the oppressed and giving them value. Even sometimes in seeing what part our actions might play in that oppression.

Disrupting existing systems by buying Fair Trade is just one example.



How we spend our money, how we value those whose work contributes to our wellbeing - even how we uphold those who do not contribute anything to our already privileged lives.

How we pray and what we pray about.
 That our holiness is more than words.
 That our holiness is about more than us.
 As I wrote this, the owl was flying over the field
 again. It was doing what owls do. I can't pray
 for it to be any different.
 But I can pray that I might be different.
 And that we can be.
 Amen

HYMN: STF 693 Beauty for brokenness

- 1 Beauty for brokenness,
 hope for despair,
 Lord, in your suffering world
 this is our prayer.
 Bread for the children,
 justice, joy, peace,
 sunrise to sunset,
 your kingdom increase !
- 2 Shelter for fragile lives,
 cures for their ills,
 work for all people,
 trade for their skills ;
 land for the dispossessed,
 rights for the weak,
 voices to plead the cause
 of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor,
 friend of the weak,
 give us compassion we pray :
 melt our cold hearts,
 let tears fall like rain ;
 come, change our love
 from a spark to a flame.*

- 3 Refuge from cruel wars,
 havens from fear,
 cities for sanctuary,
 freedoms to share.
 Peace to the killing-fields,
 scorched earth to green,
 Christ for the bitterness,
 his cross for the pain.
- 4 Rest for the ravaged earth,
 oceans and streams
 plundered and poisoned —
 our future, our dreams.
 Lord, end our madness,
 carelessness, greed ;
 make us content with
 the things that we need.

Refrain

- 5 Lighten our darkness,
 breathe on this flame
 until your justice burns
 brightly again ;
 until the nations
 learn of your ways,
 seek your salvation
 and bring you their praise.

Refrain

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)
 1993, Make Way Music Ltd

Prayers of intercession

In the change we seek,
 In the prayers we make,
 may we be the change
 our words invite;
 that we be your hands,
 your voices,
 your means,
 through which to shape,
 and renew,
 a world,
 that is fairly created,
 and justly shared.



We pray for our world:

- We pray for farmers all around the world as they grow their crops, tend to animals and craft their works. Bless those who grow Fairtrade products in their endeavours and grant them wisdom and discernment as they make decisions about how to use the benefits of Fairtrade
- We pray for those who transport Fairtrade goods to market. Grant that they, too, may be fairly treated.
- We pray for those who suffer the effects of climate change, and for our world's leaders as they prepare to make important decisions later this year
- We pray for all those who have been affected by Covid, and especially those in poorer countries where vaccination is a distant possibility. Help all those in positions of authority to share vaccines more fairly around the world.

We pray for our country:

- We pray for those in our country who import and retail Fairtrade goods, that they treat everyone in their supply chain fairly.

- We think of those working in health and social care, and ask that you strengthen them and protect them
- We pray for our leaders as they continue to make difficult choices. Grant them wisdom.

We pray for our community:

- We think of our near neighbours and friends, especially those we have not been able to meet in person.
- We pray for all who are unwell or worried about their health. Bring peace to them.
- We pray for school children and teachers, returning to classrooms this week. Help them as they re-adjust to in-person learning and teaching.
- We pray for those who mourn the loss of loved ones. May they know your love and our love surrounding them.

We pray for ourselves:

- We pray for all of us who shop where Fairtrade goods are for sale. Grant us an understanding of the impact of our choices.
- When we are feeling weary, strengthen us. When we are feeling lonely, draw close to us. When we are feeling fearful, comfort us.
- Help us to know you are with us every day, and help us to be the change we seek in the world.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your Name,
 your kingdom come, your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
 yours,
 now and for ever.
Amen.

HYMN: STF 124 For the fruits of all creation

- 1 For the fruits of all creation,
 thanks be to God ;
 for the gifts to every nation,
 thanks be to God ;

for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
 silent growth while we are sleeping,
 future needs in earth's safe-keeping,
 thanks be to God.

- 2 In the just reward of labour,
 God's will is done ;
 in the help we give our neighbour,
 God's will is done ;
 in our world-wide task of caring
 for the hungry and despairing,
 in the harvests we are sharing,
 God's will is done.
- 3 For the harvests of the Spirit,
 thanks be to God ;
 for the good we all inherit,
 thanks be to God ;
 for the wonders that astound us,
 for the truths that still confound us,
 most of all, that love has found us,
 thanks be to God.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)
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Blessing:

May the joy of the living Creator God be ours,
 May the freedom of life in his Son be ours,
 May the love of the Holy Spirit be within us and
 be shared with all we meet.
 And may we go from this time of shared
 worship
 with the blessing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
 In the world,
 And to the world,
 With our eyes and hearts set on the Kingdom
 of God
 Amen

