

The Second of our three Sundays focusing on eco related issues

Last time we thought about the element of water, we considered issues of pollution and the use of water, the impact of both these aspects on biodiversity; we thought about practical ways to address this as part of our Christian witness and daily living.

We asked the question “Why should we as Christians care about this” The over-arching answer was “Because God Cares” but we also discovered that we should care because of our integral place in the created world, because it is part of what it means to be human.

Psalm 8, read by Graham this morning is a reminder of that

Today we are focusing on the element of earth, thinking about the fruitfulness of the earth and all the resources it provides us with for life. With harvest in mind we are thinking about food, its’ production, the way in which the world’s resources are harvested and shared, about fairness and sustainability as key principles.

Part of my harvest at home this year I have made some grape jelly.

Standing amidst the aroma of my husband’s freshly baked bread I watched these grapes ripen from my kitchen window, a reminder of the Eucharist we will share shortly.

The bread itself is a great reminder of God’s daily provision for us all, and that he provided salvation for all through the body of Christ broken on the cross; the wine reminds us of the abundance provided in our natural world, and reflects the blood shed by Jesus on the cross, “The blood of the new covenant.”

Words that retell of the healing and sealing of our relationship with God.

We and all humanity depend on God in so many ways, if including provision to sustain us physically.

Jesus summed up what God requires of us in return, with two commands:

To love God totally;

To love neighbour as yourself. (Matt 22.37-40)

How we grow, buy and eat our food is fundamental in the way we live our daily lives.

How we grow, buy and eat our food should fundamentally reflect the relationships, we have with both God and with our neighbours across the world.

So here is another answer to that question, “Why should we as Christians care about this”

Because God has commanded us to show our love for him and to love our neighbour.

We need to see our Christian principles of wisdom, justice and love reflected in our own practices, as we source the food we eat, and encouraged in the practices of others in terms of the global and local management of food and food production.

As with all global issues, it's often hard to see where we, as individuals, can make a difference. But we can.

Jesus disciples felt equally at sea when faced with a massive and hungry crowd of 5000 and some.

Food was needed in large quantity.

Send them away to the nearby towns and countryside, the disciples said to Jesus.

But he didn't. Instead he replied to the disciples "You find food for them."

The disciples didn't have money to buy food.

They managed to rustle up just five loaves and two fish.

This seemed like an impossible task. But Jesus had said, "You do it!"

We know how the story goes.

No matter how impossible it seems, God's commands can be out worked in practice.

The message here is that God provides for all and that with his help, we as his faithful followers can make sure that all get their share.

In the global context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how can I as an individual make a difference, is a legitimate question to ask.

Two key areas to think about are the production of food and the way food is traded.

Some helpful concepts are: sustainability and fair trade

The EUFIC - The European Food Information Council defines sustainable food production as

"a method of production using processes and systems that are non-polluting, conserve non-renewable energy and natural resources, are economically efficient, are safe for workers, communities and consumers, and do not compromise the needs of future generations".

The 'Sustainable Student Bungalow' at Keele University, is a project which aims to highlight the various benefits of living a more sustainable lifestyle, and demonstrate in practise that this type of lifestyle is both possible and desirable on a day to day basis, for students and others.

Their daily living example includes simple things such as reducing waste output and energy consumption, composting, growing the food they eat in the garden, alongside sourcing food from local farmers.

Meanwhile, the goal of Fair trade is to make sure that companies in developed countries pay a fair price to producers in developing countries for their work.

This means not just paying them in the short term, but also helping them improve their skills, increase standards of living and create secure and sustainable livelihoods for future generations.

What does fair trade mean for producers? Whereas much trade depends on low-cost labour and exploitation of natural resources, which is neither fair nor sustainable,

Fair trade is based on partnership working that seeks to ensure farmers and workers concerns are as significant as other commercial considerations.

This is often achieved by establishing co-operatives for small producers, which gives them better negotiating ability and collective access to things that will improve the

the Fairtrade movement has its critics, amongst them those who feel that direct trading is a more reliable way of ensuring that a fairer price is given to small producers - examples can be found in the coffee industry. It's not all plain sailing, there are drawbacks with fair trade, and

We are lucky to have the CoOp as our local supermarket, they have embraced Fairtrade principles in a big way, where some others haven't. For Fairtrade to be properly successful it needs to make a bigger impact on mainstream consumerism.

Food, from production through trade, is a complex commodity and whilst to buy Fairtrade is never a bad thing, it is a starting point, not a finishing line.

Here's a quote from an article on the pros and cons of fairtrade by science writer Chris Woodford:

"Trade is about long terms relationships, not just between producers and consumers but between entire countries and regions of the world. Achieving truly fair trade means seeing the world in a different way, as a planet of partnership and mutual prosperity rather than plunder and exploitation. Fair trade is not about paying 50 cents more for your coffee; it's about caring for your "neighbours" even when they are on the other side of the world."

[Woodford, Chris. (2008/2019) Fair trade. Retrieved from <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/fairtrade.html>]

This is an issue of justice, it needs global partnerships between nations as well as pressure from consumers.

Forum for the Future, is a not for profit organisation working on the issue of sustainability and with an underpinning motto:

"Reinventing the way the world works."

They have set 4 visionary food goals for their 2030 challenge:

- To ensure that sustainable diets are the norm with more fruit, veg and plant-based proteins
- To radically reduce food waste across the system
- To fast track the ability of the food industry to deliver sustainable nutrition outcomes
- To make regenerative, resilient agriculture the mainstream

These goals can help us to identify what we can do as individuals -

- Eat more veg less meat.

*I have made extra of the plant based dish that I'll be eating at our Harvest Lunch today, please do have a try and see what you think.*

- Really try to cut down on our food waste, by planning meals and using as much of what we buy as we can. *Ref cauliflower leaf and stalk soup.*
- Keep buying Fair Trade, but also make sure we are finding out as much as you can about where our food is coming from, and how.
- Support organisations who are working in this field. There are many, often Christian based such as Concern Worldwide who run a range of programmes, designed to address the specific causes of hunger and extreme poverty in communities across 25 countries, by working locally to finding pragmatic and sustainable solutions.

I will close with a verse from Proverbs chapter 13, (v 23) which sums up the need for us to be actively thinking about the sustainability and fairness approaches we have just considered

“An unploughed field produces food for the poor,  
but injustice sweeps it away.”