

# Preaching Notes for Fairtrade Fortnight 2026

## Week 1: Sunday, 27 September

- [\*Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32\*](#) and [\*Psalms 25:1-9\*](#)
- [\*Philippians 2:1-13\*](#)
- [\*Matthew 21:23-32\*](#)

### Overall themes:

***We are called to put faith into action by treating others with love and justice***

***If we are humble, God will teach us how to live rightly***

***It's never too late to choose to do what is right***

### ***Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32***

This is quite a difficult passage. We hear the statement “*Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins who shall die*” – and yet we live in a world where children are dying in conflicts that adults started and younger people face an overheating world because of previous generations’ choices.

It may help to put the passage in context – and to look at the verses that have been omitted. Commentators [state that this passage is tackling](#) the reluctance of the exiles in Babylon to admit their role in the nation’s downfall. Their use of the proverb “the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” suggests that they think themselves free of guilt and unjustly judged. Blaming everything on one’s ancestors was easier than confronting one’s own sin and recognising the justice of God’s judgements.

So the words reported as coming from God are a response to a particular situation – not a blanket statement that suffering is always a mark of particular sinfulness or that the innocent will never suffer. Jesus would address the first misconception directly when asked about the people killed by the falling tower at Siloam: “*Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*” And Jesus would Himself show that the innocent can and do suffer, the sinless Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of all.

That said, there are some general truths being expressed. Firstly, God takes no pleasure in punishing iniquity and readily forgives someone who seeks to turn away from doing wrong. God’s justice and mercy are inextricably linked. And secondly, it is never too late to do what is right – even if someone has done what is wicked before, if they repent and change their ways, they will be forgiven.

There is also a general truth being expressed [in the words that are omitted – which constitute the definition of doing what is just and right](#). The things mentioned are related to worshipping only God and not other gods, maintaining sexual purity, not oppressing people economically, being honest, giving food and clothing to people in need, abstaining from taking interest, avoiding injustice, and maintaining justice. The person who does these things – who “walks in my statutes and keeps my rules by acting faithfully” – is defined as righteous.

Righteousness, in other words, starts with placing God at the centre ... but it doesn't stop there. It flows over into love of neighbour, a love that is seen in just and merciful treatment of others that reflects the way that God treats us.

### **How does this apply to us today?**

#### **We need to take responsibility for our part in the challenges of our times.**

As noted last week, we live in a world where there is much wrongdoing and violence – including the injustices perpetrated on many of the people who make the goods that we eat, drink, and use each day. In addition to the [examples cited last week](#), you might want to mention the cocoa supply chain, [of which Dr Thomas Purcell, senior lecturer at King's College London, has written](#): “the organisation of cocoa production underpins unequal power relations among farmers, states, commodity traders, and chocolate manufacturers.” He cites the example of Mondelez, which pulled out of Fairtrade certification and instituted its own ‘Cocoa Life’ programme, which he states “sources cocoa entirely in-house, with no minimum price guarantees or publicly verifiable commitments to environmental practices or labour standards.” He notes: “a [class action lawsuit](#) was launched in the United States accusing Mondelēz of deceptively claiming its products are 100% sustainable when it knowingly pays farmers as a little as \$3 a day, forcing families to resort to the labour of children. Such legal cases have been successfully [contested](#) by Mondelēz because, paradoxically, the plaintiffs have never been able to penetrate the supply chains that feed its *Cocoa Life* initiative.”

We cannot speak to the nature of any particular alternative to Fairtrade – but when we were visiting a cocoa cooperative in Ghana, [we heard](#) that buyers’ decisions to leave Fairtrade had meant that the premium – an amount paid per tonne which enables community development – had fallen from \$240 per metric tonne to \$80 per metric tonne – a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> decline. The farmers had no choice but to accept this: they had very little power, while the large corporations that buy, process, and retail cocoa have a great deal.

We are not directly responsible for such issues. But we are sometimes complicit. Those of us who have enough money to make choices about what we buy sometimes avoid finding out too much about corporate practices and how they affect the people behind the products we purchase. There may be many reasons for this. But there are some easy ways of determining whether people have been treated justly – like looking for the Fairtrade label. And if we aren't trying to find out, at least some of the time, are we genuinely seeking to avoid injustice?

#### **And we can make positive changes**

Each of us can consider whether and/or where we may need to ask God's forgiveness in this area. We might want to commit – where we can afford it – to searching out more Fairtrade options for products we regularly purchase. Doing so doesn't necessarily mean spending much more ourselves – for example, Lidl, Coop, and others have very affordable options for Fairtrade cocoa products.

We can also think how we might work with others to change the wider systems, perhaps through joining the [Fairtrade Foundation](#) and [Transform Trade](#) as they press for legislation to prevent environmental and human rights abuses in companies' supply chains. Or perhaps we might wish to raise particular issues with a company whose practices give us concern. It's never too late, as Ezekiel's words show us, to start.

## **Psalm 25: 1 to 9**

*“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.”*

Psalm 25 picks up some of the themes that we saw in Ezekiel and in last week’s readings, especially the theme of God’s compassion and mercy. The psalmist pleads *“Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old”* and *“do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!”*

But it also offers a response to a question the passage from Ezekiel raises: how do we move from doing wrong to doing right? The answer, it suggests, is a result of two forms of initiative. The primary initiative is God’s – God, loving by nature, is prepared to show us the right path: *“Good and upright is the Lord: therefore he instructs sinners in the way.”* But we need to be prepared to listen: in a verse that parallels the one above, the psalmist says, God *“leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way.”*

If we are humble and prepared to listen, then, we will receive instruction. But we have to have the right frame of mind – who can teach someone who thinks they know everything?

### **How can we apply this in our lives?**

Do we regularly pray for God to show us the ways in which we should walk? Where could we find time in our lives to learn more about God’s will and to listen for God’s voice? How might we study scripture more deeply to discern what God’s call to love of neighbour and to justice means?

Relating discernment to the theme of economic justice, you might suggest taking time this week to come before God asking for direction in this area. Or perhaps to read Amos 4-6, Acts 2, or Acts 4 or to look at St John Chrysostom’s teaching on wealth and poverty:

<https://sjmunson.wordpress.com/2013/02/03/robbing-the-poor-chrysostom-on-wealth-and-poverty/>

## **Philippians 2: 1 to 13**

The epistle takes the themes explored thus far to the next stage, showing us what true humility is and how those who have it are able to follow God’s ways, exhibiting loving and righteous behaviour towards others.

This week’s reading is one of the most famous passages in the Pauline epistles, as it includes what is often called the ‘Philippians hymn’ (vv 6 to 11) – beautiful verses, [perhaps adapted from contemporary worship](#), that set out Christ’s self-sacrificing love in the incarnation and crucifixion ... and rejoice in his consequent exaltation.

Paul incorporates these verses as part of his call to the early Christian community to imitate Christ individually and corporately – to *“be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind, do[ing] nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard[ing] others as better than yourselves ... look[ing] not to your own interests but to the interests of others.”*

The verb translated as *“be of the same mind”* and *“let this mind be in you”* is *phroneō*, which [Professor Jane Lancaster Patterson says](#) is better understood as meaning *“to have a depth of*

*understanding and practical wisdom, to know how to act rightly, especially in confusing or complex circumstances.”* The early disciples are being called, amidst the tumult and potential persecution that they face, to embody that wisdom and discernment which was found in Christ as He encountered the confusion of our world.

That wisdom, Paul makes clear – as the Psalmist had – is rooted in humility, and an extreme humility at that. The believers are to “*do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit*” – advice on avoiding key vices that may feel familiar. But they are to go further – “*in humility regarding others as better*” than themselves, foregoing their own interests in the service of others. Humility here doesn’t just have the sense of avoiding false pride – as Professor Ryan Schellenberg [points out](#), the Greek word implies an active giving up of status and acceptance of lowliness.

And this, of course, is exactly what Christ did. His was the humility that meant He “*did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness, and ... humbled... himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.*”

Paul is encouraging us to focus our eyes on the model of Christ’s humility and to pray that we may, with God’s help and however falteringly, learn obedience to God’s ways and follow Christ in God’s paths. We are, Paul says, to work towards this goal, towards our salvation. But we do not work alone: Paul notes that “*it is God*” – the God whom Ezekiel has already told us does not wish to see the death of a sinner – “*who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*”

### ***How can we apply this?***

This is a call on our whole lives, and turning from such an exalted call to questions of Fairtrade may seem anticlimactic. Certainly, thinking about trade is simply a small part of the greater whole. But Christ speaks about the importance of being faithful in small things: “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” (Luke 16: 10 ESV) So it’s worth considering how we can live out the call to a Christlike life in our trading relationships.

Over the years, we have found, as we noted last week, that one of the most effective ways of reminding ourselves why Fairtrade matters is to listen to stories about unjust trade and then ask the question “How would I feel if ....?”

- How would I feel if I were a banana plantation worker and my children were being affected by the pesticides sprayed over our living quarters?
- How would I feel if I were a cocoa grower, working ever harder to grow my crops despite the floods and droughts that are becoming more frequent in our warming world ... and yet I was not paid enough for my labour, while my products gave other people pleasure and made companies wealthy?
- How would I feel if I were a young person in a cocoa-growing family which couldn’t afford to send me to finish my education?

For those of us who are in economically privileged positions, asking the question is a tiny first step towards exploring what it means to be made truly vulnerable by a lack of privilege. It forces an acknowledgement that brothers and sisters, people exactly like us, are caught in a system that harms them in myriad ways – from impairing their health to denying their dignity, all in the

interests of providing profits and cheap products for other people ... including us. For those of us who aren't in privileged positions, the stories may well feel familiar – ours will be sympathy rather than empathy.

But the question then becomes: how do we “*look not to [our] own interests but to the interests of others*”?

Thinking simply of how we trade, it's clear that we need to seek out forms of trading that place other people's interests at their heart. That is where Fairtrade standards – and the [WFTO's 10 Principles of Fair Trade and Fair Trade standard](#) (which is business-based, not product-based) – can be helpful. They are a start at portraying what trading relationships that are “Fair to people”, as the Fairtrade Fortnight slogan says, might look like.

In the case of Fairtrade:

- They set a Minimum Price for each product, which offers a safety net for farmers and workers when market prices fall, while enabling farmers and workers to benefit from higher market prices if they are available.
- They add on a Fairtrade Premium, an additional amount of money, based on volumes of sales, that producers can invest according to their own priorities – whether that's to fund local clinics, help children with their education, pave roads for easier access to markets, improve access to water, or any other development need.
- They mandate certain standards for buyers, including the development of longer term contracts and reasonable terms of payment.
- They [set rules for](#) “rights at work, safe conditions, and democratic structures in producer cooperatives, ensuring farmers and workers have a stronger voice.”

So buying Fairtrade or WFTO Fair Trade products wherever we are able to do so – and encouraging our schools, workplaces, churches, and other groups to do the same – is a way of supporting others' interests. It's a way of ensuring that the banana plantation workers doesn't need to worry about indiscriminate pesticide spraying harming their family or about being blacklisted for joining a union ... that the cocoa farmer has more money to improve their own or their family's circumstances. It is a small way of being faithful that can often have a large impact on someone else's life.

This may also challenge our broader patterns of consumption: we may find ourselves buying less clothing in order to buy fairer clothing, for example. Closer to home, we might also wish to ask our local farmers where they are experiencing issues with power structures and think about how we can support them by altering our patterns of buying.

We may also look more widely than our individual choices. Challenging the vast power imbalances that create vulnerability is another way of prioritising other people's interests. As noted above, we can join with the Fairtrade Foundation and Transform Trade to seek greater justice in supply chains. We can also campaign for garment workers' rights with [Labour behind the Label](#). We can campaign for banana workers with [Banana Link](#).

And once we have begun to move in this direction, we may find our viewpoints shifting even more radically. Because once we start to think in terms of how activities or events impact other people, and to place their interests at the very least on a par with, if not above our own, it challenges much of the way in which our societies are structured. The challenge in Jesus' life –

and the repeated challenge in the Gospels over this period “the last shall be first and the first last” – are meant to be world-shaking.

### **Matthew 21: 23 to 32**

Jesus’ teaching and life bring liberation and freedom to those who are humble. For the religious leaders, however, Christ poses a threat – and in the Gospel passages that we see during this period and almost up to the beginning of Advent, Christ faces one challenge after another.

This week, following his overturning of the tables in the Temple, the question from the chief priests and elders is simple: “*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*” Jesus responds with a return challenge: He will tell them who gave him authority if they will tell Him whether John the Baptist’s baptism came from heaven or was of human origin. This puts them in a quandary: if they say heaven, then they can be condemned for not believing John; if they say of human origin, they will be rejected by the crowd, who regard John as a prophet. So they temporise: “*We do not know.*” “*Neither,*” says Christ, “*will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.*”

Jesus follows this with the parable of the two sons: one of whom is called to go and work in the vineyard, refuses, but changes his mind and goes, and the other who responds affirmatively ... but fails to take action. “*Which of the two,*” He asks, “*did the will of the Father?*”

Going to work in the vineyard was a clear way of speaking about doing God’s work among God’s people: references to Israel and Judah as a vineyard abound in Scripture.

So when the Pharisees give the only possible answer – the first son – Jesus hastens to explain His meaning. Those who appear to have responded positively to God are, in fact, not doing their duty to lead the people spiritually. But those who are marginalised and sinners, who have heard God’s word, been open to it, and repented, are replacing them: *the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.*”

As we have seen throughout this week’s readings, God’s Kingdom is open to the humble and repentant for whom it is never too late to turn from evil and do good. The merciful God is flinging open the doors, teaching the way – will we listen and enter? Or will we be too preoccupied with our status, material well-being, or self-centred concerns to hear His call?