

Is your post like mine? Every week, sometimes everyday I get letters from charities whose aims, ethos, compassion, selflessness and often Christian witness I applaud, sympathise with and would love to support.

The trouble is how do you support all of them? I know that if I tried then they would all end up receiving something minute like 23p, which decreased every time a new charity letter arrived on my doormat and drew a proportion of the funds away in another new direction.

We want to do good, we want to help as many people as possible, but we know that we just don't have the resources to do it. Well, I would like to release you from a bit of that guilt today by challenging you to give to communities in a God honouring way when you shop.

Let's start with God's Word because this week sees the beginning of Lent, the time we use to prepare for Easter and we remember Jesus being led out into the wilderness by God's Holy Spirit for forty days where he was tempted by the devil and withstood those temptations.

At the end of his fast Jesus is hungry and isolated – that's when Satan comes to him and tempts him and in a sense it is all pretty basic stuff; food, self-worth and power. I suspect that we can all be susceptible to those temptations, for example we live in a society which grazes; as we work we munch through a biscuit, have a break and visit a vending machine or watch TV with a bag of crisps, or visit the cinema and buy popcorn – we don't necessarily need to eat, but we graze.

For many people in our society our stomach has become our god, our driving force, our constant reassurance, even if we don't live like that then our fridges and freezers and store cupboards tell a striking story. Most of them are much fuller than our parents or grandparents larders or pantries were and I suspect that even the most conscientious amongst us throw more food away than our parents or grandparents did.

We have come to expect food to be on demand to us at anytime of the day or night, a very different mindset from previous generations, but very similar to being able to turn the stones in the desert into bread to eat, "Do it for yourself, do it now!"

Then again, we want to know that we have self worth and we use our food to do that - this is not just any meal – "this is an M&S meal", the adverts are telling us that we deserve quality food, we don't just eat any food – we eat special food, in fact we deserve Tesco Finest and Sainsbury's Taste the Difference too. Our self worth comes from having the right labels on our foods as well as the right labels on our clothes and shoes.

And all that starts early these days at school and with sports equipment, the right label marks us out as someone who has worth.

But here is the problem, by doing that we exert power over others. We demand designer labels, but refuse to think about children working in factories to produce those items, we demand high volume, high quality food at low prices but never stop to think of the impact upon farmers. Just this last week hundreds of British pig farmers presented David Cameron with a giant sausage to try to get the point across that they are losing money with every pig they sell.

And the problem is global, our foods and our everyday commodities come from all around the world and if our farmers are struggling because of our shopping habits, then farmers in even poorer communities are going to be suffering to an greater extent.

Now, here's the rub, Psalm 33 verse 5 tells us that "The LORD loves righteousness and justice" and yet we have just established that most of the time when we shop we consciously or unconsciously give into the temptations Jesus faced and withstood and we behave unrighteously and unjustly towards the world's farmers.

But I can hear what you're saying; "Malcolm, I thought you said that you were going to make us feel less guilty – not more guilty." And I will, but we just have to establish that basic fact first.

The cry of the Psalmist is this; "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you." And God heard the psalmist and he has heard the world's farmers too.

About 20 years the Fair Trade movement began and churches instantly saw how this concept could allow farmers to receive a fair price for their work and that money from the sales of their crops or herds or products could also be used to benefit the whole of their community. It allowed us as Christians, concerned about what God is concerned about, to shop more righteously and more justly.

And it isn't as if Fair trade is second best, you don't have to sacrifice quality – Cadburys chocolate, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, Rowse honey and even some of the Finest and taste the difference products are Fair trade.

And don't just think food, there's beauty products, sports products and a lot of cotton items which can all be bought under the Fair-trade banner, in fact, the clerical shirt that I am wearing today is a Fair Trade clerical shirt.

What it all boils down to is this, are we just Christians in our church building? And I hope that the answer is "no". I hope that we have hearts for God in the supermarket just as much as we do in the pew and that we want to be inspired by Jesus and withstand the temptations of the devil to put our own desires over the needs of others. So how does this help us to feel a little less guilty that we can't give to more charities?

Because when we shop we can be confident that we are giving to poor communities rather than greedy multinationals simply by choosing to swap our regular product for a Fair trade one.

Last year at the Keswick Convention I discovered Ubuntu Cola, a Fair trade cola which I think tastes as good as Coke. It uses Fair-trade sugar from the Kasinthula Cooperative in Malawi and from the Kaleya Cooperative in Zambia. So, look, who would I rather support, the communities in Malawi and Zambia, or the global giant that is Coca-Cola? It's a no-brainer. Sometimes fair trade products cost a little more, but I know the extra 6p I pay for a can of Ubuntu goes to a much better cause than the whole 54p that goes to Coca-Cola.

I think that John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York sums it up really well when he says, "As a Christian, I want trade to be an expression of the reality that all men and women are my brothers and sisters, to whom I owe justice, respect, and the best possible future."

When Jesus finally banished Satan from his presence in the wilderness he declared emphatically, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

The question we need to ask as we go round our supermarket or click on our online shopping is are we worshipping God as we do that and treating men and women created in the image of God with justice and respect.

God's word tells us God loves justice and that he loves us to show justice too. We may not be able to support every charity who send us a letter, but we can make a big difference with our shopping trolley. Why not try it this week, and show off your Fair trade label.