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Dear readers,

I hope that you are all enjoying the glorious weather (and coping with the resulting hayfever!)

Did you know that this week is Loneliness Awareness Week?

According to research presented by the ONS,

"Between 3 April and 3 May 2020, 5.0% of people (about 2.6 million adults) said that they felt **lonely** 'often' or 'always'.

Why not [take a look at some ideas](#) on how you could reach out to someone who is isolated in your community, or even access our [free Rural Isolation and Loneliness toolkit](#)?

Stay connected,

Rachael (on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre team)

Good trees, good fruit

Bible reading: Luke 6:43-45

'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.'

Reflection

Food seems to be one subject that was a hot topic before the pandemic and has remained one during it. Other things may have fallen away but what we put on our plates has kept coming up.

Before the pandemic what we eat was big news, mostly with the debate on climate change and with people asking questions about meat. During the pandemic, the more basic need to access food was news; we saw panic buying from supermarkets to start with and the closure of restaurants. Working from home, home schooling and the instruction to stay at home all put more emphasis on us handling, cooking and eating food we had prepared.

In the debate before the pandemic, I remember being at an AHDB (Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board) seminar on people's food purchasing habits and noting that their research was indicating consumers were taking more of an interest in the food they bought, for environmental reasons and for health reasons. Listening to similar debates now I hear that during the pandemic we have kept up this interest but broadened our gaze to include not just supermarkets but also our local producers.

In today's reading, Jesus uses food cultivation as a metaphor: 'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit.' The fruit of the tree reveals the quality of its origin.

Jesus is reflecting on individuals and the words they speak. Words that are intended to hurt, puff up or that lie indicate the motivation of the person that spoke them; words that heal, appreciate or speak truth to power equally speak of someone's motivation.

But I also think that what Jesus says can be taken more literally. When we are motivated to produce food well – when we protect our environment, have due concern for animal welfare, think about nutrition, make careful choices shopping and be careful not to waste our food – it speaks volumes about us. Those of us whose rural context is agricultural will have some awareness of the challenges facing those who produce our food; some of us will be facing those challenges ourselves.

These words of Jesus ring true for my day job thinking about issues such as trade deals and environmental schemes for farmers, but also remind me to pay attention to my diet and my shopping, and to the wellbeing of those producing my food.

Prayer

Jesus, wellspring of the living water, fill our hearts with love, our minds with wisdom and motivate our hands to do your work.

Help us to cherish the fruit produced from the good tree and seek out that food which reflects your desire for the world.

In doing so, make us your children and set us free with all of creation by your Spirit, that we may enter into the kingdom of the Father, to whom and the Spirit we pray. Amen.

Response

Throughout the pandemic many of us have changed our habits with eating and shopping.

- What are the good things that you have discovered? Can we give thanks for these in our prayers?
- Can we find new ways of putting the food we produce into our prayer life?
- How might we pray for those who produce our food, particularly those we know?
- How might we pray for those who don't have access to good food, particularly those in our own communities?

And how might we be the answers to our own prayers?

Revd Dr Mark Betson, National Rural Officer for the Church of England