

EDUCATION SUNDAY

16TH FEBRUARY 2014

The ninth Sunday before Easter is traditionally set aside by all the Christian Churches as Education Sunday.

Going above and beyond ...

Matthew 5.21-37

www.educationsunday.org.uk

2014 marks the centenary of the start of the First World War. There will be many events around the country, celebrations of heroism in the face of danger and national soul-searching about the justification for war. Some young people will be given the opportunity to visit First World War battlefields and cemeteries, and others will learn about some of the people, perhaps even their ancestors, who played a part in the war.

At the heart of many discussions will be the question of obedience. Those who fought in the First World War, and any combat situation before or since were required to obey orders, no matter what their personal feelings might be. Others who objected to war in obedience to their faith or conscience were stigmatised, branded as cowards and even imprisoned.

Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount emphasise that, as Christians, we are not simply called to follow the letter of the Law, but are subject to a much more radical obedience to its spirit. Jesus emphasises that he has not come to do away with the Law of Moses (v.17), but to intensify it. He uses contrasts to distinguish between the literal meaning of scripture and its valid interpretation, and claims the authority to teach this new way, going above and beyond conventional understandings. Each of the examples Jesus gives illustrates an area of life in which the principles set out in verses 17-20 work out in practice.



About Education Sunday:

Education Sunday is a day of prayer and celebration for everyone involved in the world of education. For more than a hundred years there has been an annual recognition of Education Sunday in England and Wales (traditionally on the ninth Sunday before Easter). The resources are designed to help you prepare for your own celebration on or around Education Sunday, or on any other day during the year, such as the start or end of the academic year. You can use these resources in your church, in local schools, colleges and universities, and in other places of learning.

Our relationships with others are central to Jesus' teaching in this passage. He demands that we go beyond the commandment not to commit murder, but instead that we strive to make things right with others in our families or communities. Today we often speak of tolerance, but instead of this, if we follow the way of Jesus, we are called to respect and even love others. Anger and insults, Jesus says, are indicative of a desire to get rid of someone who gets in our way, maybe even wishing they were dead. If we want to avoid committing murder in God's sight, we must put things right immediately and restore relationships, with the aim of living together in peace and love.

Edith Cavell, a British nurse who served in Belgium, was faced with such choices as the First World War advanced. The hospital in which she worked became a Red Cross hospital when Belgium was occupied, and as such, treated the wounded of both sides. She could not afford to hate or judge those who came to her for help. Edith helped over 200 men to escape, which was construed by the Germans as an act of treason. After trial by court martial, she was executed. Her final words have become well-known throughout the world and are an embodiment of Jesus' commands in the Sermon of the Mount, recognising that our actions are not merely subject to earthly justice but have eternal consequences. "...standing as I do in view of God and Eternity," she said, "I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone."

In the other examples, we are told that obedience may involve sacrifice and pain. Maybe we don't literally need to take out and throw away our eyes to avoid looking on that which tempts us (v. 29), but there are consequences in following the way of faith and conscience. Jesus tells us that our actions should demonstrate integrity, and that our words should always be truthful.

In the world of education we often find ourselves in challenging situations. We may have to deal with difficult people and think that our lives would be so much easier if they just weren't there. We may be confronted with choices that tempt us to do what we know we should not, or at times it might be easier just to go along with the crowd. However, whether we're in school, college or university, we are called as disciples, and with this calling comes the requirement that we go above and beyond the letter of the law, living out a radical faith.



Lectionary Readings

Revised Common Lectionary

Deuteronomy 30.15-20

Psalms 119.1-8

1 Corinthians 3.1-9

Matthew 5.21-37

Catholic Lectionary

Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 15:15-20

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Matthew 5:17-37



The resources for Education Sunday are compiled by Churches Together in England on behalf of member churches and Bodies in Association.