

EDUCATION SUNDAY

SERMON/HOMILY NOTES

16TH FEBRUARY 2014

Going above and beyond ...

Matthew 5.21-37

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Introduction:

The role of church is to be a discipleship community, living prophetically within society and pointing the way towards Jesus and His Kingdom. This means that each of life-choices, individually and together, must reflect the values of that God whom we know in Jesus.

This year many Christians and other thinking people would have preferred to celebrate the centenary of *the end* of hostilities rather than *the start* of a World War.....but we have what we have. As the Church, we need to share God's values with the world and its agenda (which others decide), however difficult it is to live God's prophetic calling in response.

It will be a blessed preacher whose congregation all have the same private views. Most will be very mixed, from those bereaved or injured by warfare, to those traumatised by civilian bombings or personal torture, and who renounce violence, who know they would '*turn the other cheek*'. It is right that we turn to listen together for God's word in the Bible...

For those using the Revised Common Lectionary:

Deuteronomy 30.15-20: Here the Hebrew Law-giver tells us that we have a choice '*between good and evil, between life and death*' pointing out that disobedience to the way of life brings destruction. So '*choose life*' [v.19] so you, your descendants and the community around will live.

Psalms 119.1-8: This song of faith begins with Beatitudes - '*Blessed are...*' statements, about those who live as God intended, honouring and following God's commandments. The song of the faithful is that they will do this, which means bringing no threats, and therefore peace, to our neighbour.

Matthew 5.21-37: This is the key part of Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, which follows that wonderful passage of '*Blessed are...*', known as the Beatitudes. Here the Gospel writer records how Jesus exhorts us to make peace or sort things out before the full force of the law weighs in. Gandhi reportedly said "*an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind*", and Jesus tells us that extends to the very personal matters of adultery or divorce. So let us be plain speaking – our yes meaning yes, no meaning no. What would happen if our national leaders spoke so plainly?

1 Corinthians 3.1-9: Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that he is having to instruct them simply as they are following the world's ways, including quarrelling and jealousy. In such worldly lives, practices like this lead to greed for land, wealth and power, creating violence, if not war. Paul tells the Corinthians not to break up into arguing factions but recognise that they are one as God's people. This means that they are co-workers in God's world, for God's righteousness (justice and peace).

The key point of these readings is that God's call through his chosen faithful people, revealed supremely in Jesus, is to make the choices that demonstrate God's wholeness and love for all the created order, whoever and wherever, that the world might have life.

For those using the Catholic Lectionary:

Sirach 15.15-20: Here the wise Jewish mystic reminds every believer that they have the personal choice between opposites – ‘fire and water’ and ‘life and death’. Will we do as Pope Francis teaches: make the choices that celebrate life and God’s wholeness, rather than the evil ones?

Matthew 5.17-37: Jesus came not to abolish the ‘Laws of Moses and the Prophets’ but to remind us that we have to both teach and live out those values as Jesus’ Community in today’s world.

1 Corinthians 2.6-10: Paul tells the Corinthians that God’s wisdom is for the wise and the spiritually mature. In quoting Isaiah and Sirach, Paul reminds the faithful that the Spirit of God will search out and know their true intentions in matters of discipleship.

The key point of these readings is that God has plainly shown to God’s people, the Church within society, that there are prophetic, right and wise choices which we must teach and show - if the world is to have life as God intended.

....and in conclusion

Apart from the historic Peace Churches, such as the Quakers, the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren, many Christians used to believe in the ‘just war’, when only the combatants fought, civilians were not hurt and were excluded from the theatre of war’ and the means used were proportionate to threat and opposing force. Post Hiroshima, post-Dresden, post-Coventry or the Blitz, there is no longer such a thing as ‘just war’.

World War 1 may have been the last such ‘just war’. As any of us who have stood at the Menin Gate on the edge of Flanders fields, as the Last Post is daily sounded, remembering that World War, we know our tears are not enough to salve the sacrifice of the thousands of brave fallen, whose names are carved on that gateway. It is living and teaching those values which will mean this never happens again. The Quaker poster which quotes John Stoner entitled ‘A Modest Proposal for Peace’ says ‘*Let the Christians of this world agree together - to stop killing one another*’. That is part of God’s new beginning, but are we ready to teach it?



Sermon notes by Revd Dr Andrew Francis
Photographs courtesy of Julie Grove and Jim Currin



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

