

SERMON NOTES EDUCATION SUNDAY 2022

READINGS JEREMIAH 4:11-12, 22-28 LUKE 15:1-10

Education Sunday gives us the opportunity to reflect on the way that teaching and learning takes place day by day in many different formal settings in our communities including preschools, schools, sixth form colleges, colleges of further education and universities, as well as in our daily lives. On this special Sunday we particularly and specifically celebrate the work of all educators working to support learners in many different ways in our communities.

On this Sunday we take time to explore ways that teachers help us through our learning, to engage with the world around us. Teachers help those they are teaching to thrive in their thinking, allowing individuals to push the boundaries as they develop their own skills as independent learners. Jesus did this with his disciples as he encouraged them to learn together and to explore the world, looking afresh in their response to the insights that he shared with them about God, about themselves and about the inclusive community that they would help to shape.

Teaching and learning involves facts and discovery, both of which are important. We perhaps see this distinction when a school asks that a class might look round the church building. What we show our visitors is the 'hardware' which help us to engage in worship; the font, the reading desk, the communion table and the myriad of other important items. These remain important items which sit there until someone reads the Bible from the reading desk, bread and wine are shared at the table, and children and adults are engaged in worship, at which point life, laughter and learning are expressed and explored in a dynamic and fruitful way.

Our lectionary readings today point us to the way that our learning about God engages our faith in the lives that we live and in the life of the world. The prophet Jeremiah likens the people of Israel to those who will not learn about God, even if all can do so as they have been given the opportunity. One of the things that Jeremiah is sharing is the fact that the people have lost their way, have not listened to their teachers or to God, and as a result their experience of the world and of faith are diminished. They have lost out and don't get a full picture of the way that world is and the way that the world can be. It would take time to rediscover what is lost, as that is a continuing process, but Jeremiah saw possibility in the future with the new covenant which would be written on people's hearts (Jeremiah 31 v 31 -34).

Today's gospel reading shows something of the way that Jesus taught when he spoke about that which was lost, in this case a sheep and a coin. He often told stories to get his message across and was able to fire people's imagination in their thinking about God. He does so again here, and he does this so that the farmers he was speaking with would take note!

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We all lose things, it's part of being human! Jesus teaches about how when something is lost we go out of our way to find it again; in this case a sheep and a coin. Jesus speaks first of the sheep that is lost. Every shepherd there would know of that situation, of one sheep wandering off, getting lost, perhaps going down a ridge in search of the best pasture. Once the count has been made, the one sheep that is missing has to be found. To go looking for a lost sheep and bring that sheep home is a difficult process. Locating a sheep that is lost is one thing, getting to where the sheep is to bring it back is another. Shepherd and sheep both have to trust each other in a lesson that neither would forget.

Then Jesus speaks of a woman who had ten silver coins. One is lost and the search is on to find it. I know just what it means to lose something. When I do I try to retrace my steps and think hard about where I saw it last. When the coin (or just as likely in our day something like a mobile phone) is found, there is both relief and rejoicing. Jesus is teaching us here in a way which allows us to rejoice when the coin is found! Both the shepherd and the woman who lost the coin want to let everyone know that what was lost has now been found. They won't lose what is valuable again in a hurry!

Jesus tells these parables in a way that people listen to a story that they can relate to. They are engaged by the story and at the end everyone has to make up their mind about what Jesus is sharing – the sign of a good teacher indeed! Jesus points people to a way of talking about God in the world which takes note of both material and the spiritual aspects of our learning. Our learning takes us to new places as we explore the world at different stages and ages of our lives. Our knowledge of the world around us is formed by enquiry, helped by those who teach us as we seek Jesus' vision of 'life in all its fullness' which is at the heart of our practical and spiritual development at every stage of life.

Both Jeremiah and Jesus lived in different times and in a different cultures to us, but they both shared something which inspired them and those around them as they explored the world and faith together. Perhaps what we can learn here is something that is significant to this Education Sunday, in that curiosity is something that a good teacher will pick up and will develop in a learner, offering something which allows both to go beyond the expected. As Jesus taught, he allowed his disciples to do the same, helping people to explore beyond the world that they knew to engage with the way of God and to rejoice when new creative insights are gained. We continue to learn from Jesus' teaching today.

On this Education Sunday we celebrate the contribution of all teachers who give us the tools and the insights to help create a world where knowledge is explored, and where love, hope, justice and integrity are to be found and lived out. We remember all learners as well, both in formal settings and at home, as we seek to provide space for learning to take place.

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As we do so we find more and more that we have so much to thank our teachers for.

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