

Suggested Readings for Use on Further Education Sunday

Matthew 4 v 18-21 (NLT)

The First Disciples

¹⁸ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!”²⁰ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

²¹ A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too.

Matthew 11 v 28-28 (NLT)

²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Isaiah 61 v 1-9 (NLT)

Good News for the Oppressed

⁶¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.² He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord’s favor has come, and with it, the day of God’s anger against their enemies.³ To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory.⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations.⁵ Foreigners will be your servants. They will feed your flocks and plow your fields and tend your vineyards.⁶ You will be called priests of the Lord, ministers of our God. You will feed on the treasures of the nations and boast in their riches.⁷ Instead of shame and dishonor, you will enjoy a double share of honor. You will possess a double portion of prosperity in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.⁸ “For I, the Lord, love justice. I hate robbery and wrongdoing. I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering and make an everlasting covenant with them.⁹ Their descendants will be recognized and honored among the nations. Everyone will realize that they are a people the Lord has blessed.”

Sermon Notes for Further Education Sunday

These passages present us with a model for working in the Further Education sector. They are in particular important to consider when thinking about the role of chaplains within colleges. But equally they present a challenge to us all as we try and represent Christ in the world.

Have you noticed how often Jesus uses the word come in his conversation. In our new testament passages Jesus invites people to come to him, to follow him. Come is a really wonderful word. It is invitational, it is warm. It is valuing of the person with whom you are talking. Jesus never forced himself on anyone. But he was always

inviting people to come and experience come and see and come and receive from him. This invitational nature of Jesus should be a hallmark of our faith – we should be known for it. How important it is then in a missional context such as a further education college.

In schools and colleges we seek to be ministers of presence – we try to bring the person and character of Jesus into our student and staff communities. That means that we must, as far as we are able, minister like Jesus. That means we too must be invitational.

Lets look at some of the invitations of Jesus.

He says come to me all you who are burdened and heavy laden. Jesus invited people to have their burdens lifted, to find rest.

One of the things I am constantly made aware of by staff and students at our colleges is how burdened they are. Mental health issues, exam pressures, family discord, bereavement, relationship problems, money worries. Lots of students don't cope with these very well. Some take their own life, many drop out. What they often need in addition to real practical help is someone to share their burden. Someone to walk alongside and carry it with them for a time. They need to know that someone cares enough to want to help. That's what Jesus did. That's what he was doing when he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah we read in chapter 61. All the time. That's what our chaplains do. That's part of what it means to be invitational.

IN a passage we didn't read in Mark 10 we read this: One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ...

Jesus invited people young people to come to him so that they might receive a blessing.

How often do we long for a blessing. In my own life and the role I play I have been blessed for many years by people financially and prayerfully supporting me, by giftys of holidays or in one year a new car! The people who blessed my family were being like Jesus in this passage.

How can we bless students and staff at a college? One chaplain does it in a very simple way – each Friday he goes round all the classrooms with a box of sweets and lollipops. The sweets are a welcome gift but the smile, the kind word, the presence of the chaplain is what really brings the blessing.

In a college I was working with students were arriving at lessons not having eaten a breakfast, so a local church arranged for sausage rolls and other snacks to be made available. That's was a blessing.

In another college the creation and manning of a reflective space has been a blessing.

Remembering a students name and being glad to see them was an immense blessing to a young woman I met who felt unloved and unnoticed in her context.

Bringing blessing is part of being invitational.

Our other short reading from the new testament was the call of the disciples. Jesus invites people to follow him and discover a new purpose for their lives. This is not proselytising but invitation. I really believe that when people discover Jesus, the Jesus of the gospels not of social media or tv, they will respond to that invitation. But to make

it we need to know the students and staff. We need to be in community with them, to be in a trusting and established relationship with them. We need to be there.

The invitation to come and follow was to all who are disciples – its an invitation we said yes to. So we continue to follow Jesus to wherever he will take us. I strongly believe that he is present in our colleges, caring for staff and students. Will we follow him there? Will we consider being a visitor a chaplain a helper? If we do then we take up his challenge and make it our own as we say to all we meet. Come.

Small Group Ideas

Why not have your small groups focus on FE during the weeks surrounding FE Sunday?

You could show the video that goes with the notes above, draw on the Bible readings and use the content as a starting point for discussion and prayer. Why not invite a guest who has connections with FE so that they can share their own experience?

Here is a suggested outline for a small group evening:

- Starter: In your group share any experience of colleges you or members of your family might have. Work out how much you know between you as a group.
- Film: Watch the short intro film – What is a further education college?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p64cTC06Lzk> How do group members respond?
- Reading: Read the three bible passages that form the foundation of FE Sunday this year
- Discussion: At the heart of the readings are thoughts about invitation.
 - What are the burdens young people are carrying today?
 - Are we able to offer something as a church community that could help relieve those burdens? What would it look like
 - How might we as a church bless our local community and especially our local college?
 - Do the readings speak to us in other ways about our church family life and mission?
 - How might we further engage with the FE Sector as a church community and as individuals
- Prayer: Spend some time praying for FE as you draw your meeting to a formal close. You could use some of the prayer resources available as part of FE Sunday or if you have a guest you could ask them for specific prayer needs.
- Response: As you close your meeting give space to allow people to respond to what they have learned – do any of your group feel that working with FE could be for them or should be a ministry initiative within your church?

If you feel you would like to know more or have further input, feel free to contact West Midlands Churches FE Council at info@wmcfec.org.uk

#FESunday

Prayers for Use in Churches on FE Sunday

You can either use these prayers as they are, or use them to inspire your own.

Father God, on this day we bring to you our prayers for all those involved in Further Education:

We pray for students. We ask that they will find and fulfil their purpose as they study. We ask that they will discover their place in their college community, making friends and finding joy and life in their studies. Bless them with a love of learning and may they come to discover you in all they do and those they meet. We thank you for all students and all they bring to our communities.

We pray for teaching staff. We ask that they will be fulfilled in their work. We ask that you will bless them with patience and tolerance. We pray that you will sustain them physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually as they teach and reach out to students day-in, day-out. We thank you for them and their commitment to helping so many young people.

We pray for management. We recognise the economic and political pressures that exist in the world of education. We know that hard decisions are having to be made on a daily basis. We ask for compassionate wisdom for all involved in managing our colleges. We ask that you will give them insight and empathy so that they can be assured in their decision making. We thank you for them and their commitment to the sector.

We pray for chaplains and chaplaincy volunteers. In so many of our colleges the church has responded to the needs of staff and students alike and established chaplaincy projects. We pray for chaplains, for church volunteers, for organisations such as Festive who support Christian students, that you will equip them to be bringers of good news. However they serve, whatever needs they are asked to meet, bless them with grace and may they bring your presence into the heart of the places they visit. We thank you for them, for their call and their vision.

And finally we offer prayers for (NAME YOUR LOCAL COLLEGE). We recognise its important place in our community, the hard work and dedication of its staff and the successes of its students. May it be a place of life for all who are part of its community. We thank you for (NAME YOUR LOCAL COLLEGE) and rejoice in all its achievements. Help us discern how best we may serve it in future and guide us in our dealings and contacts.

All these prayers we offer in the name of Jesus
Amen



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