**The Revd Dr Jenny Wright, Chaplain to the Archbishop of York, reflects on James 2.1-17 for Education Sunday, 8th September.**

This past week saw our children going back to school. I'm sure there are many relieved parents in this country who are delighted that schools have come back after the six-and-a-half-week summer break. I'm sure there are teachers who are looking forward to getting back into the classroom, and chaplains who are looking forward to reconnecting with their school communities.

This Sunday is also Education Sunday, and it is a reminder of all the many, many ways in which children and young people are supported in their education. It is also a reminder of how important education is and having access to a good school with good teachers, with the necessary resources to learn well, not only in school, but at home.

And alongside that, of course, comes the reminder that education is not to be taken for granted. We spend a lot of time talking about education in this country, talking about how we can do better by our children, how children can be encouraged to learn better, about how we can eradicate bullying in schools and allow school to be a positive experience for many, many children.

You might have different memories to school, to what I have. I loved school. Perhaps I was unusual in that. But I enjoyed going to school, I enjoyed learning, and I was blessed to have wonderful teachers who cared and nurtured the pupils in their classrooms. I can't help but watch the news and think about how many children are losing out on their education.

War is not only displacing people, but war means upending education for children too. There are many countries where girls do not have equal access for education, and ongoing campaigns seek to right that inequality. But what might this have to do with the Church? Why do churches mark Education Sunday? Well, James gives us something of an answer because James speaks quite openly about faith without works being dead.

What good is it if we believe but we do not do what our faith teaches us to do? What good is it if we love God, but we do not show our love for neighbour, too? We need to live out a faith that seeks to do good in this world. Our faith doesn't wait for people to come into the church, but our faith gets out there encouraging those in the community by what we are doing and living out as Christians. And what is that, but to seek justice?

And so, education does matter to us, too. Not only because the Church has always been involved in schools, and we have so many wonderful Church of England schools in this country, and so many wonderful school chaplains and university chaplains, but it matters because justice matters to us, because equality matters to us, because we want to seek a world where all children have access to resources, where all children have access to an education that will set them up for life, that will allow them to go on to higher education, should they choose, that they don't have to sit and learn underneath a tree, that they don't have to sit in leaky classrooms, sharing one textbook between 20, or 30, or 40 students. That they don't have to sit and wait for a teacher who is never going to turn up because there are no teachers left in the community.

So yes, it matters to us, to care for the children in our own church communities. It matters to us to support charities who are doing excellent work overseas to ensure quality of education. It matters to us to support charities financially when they are trying to set up classrooms and learning resources for children who do not have access to any of the basic needs. And so, yes, James is not an easy read this week. James reminds us that we cannot just live our spiritual good lives, but that we need to put our faith into practice. So let us pray that God will help us do that in a way that is kind, and loving, and good. Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you for the start of this new school year. We pray that you will bless our schools, the pupils, the communities, the teachers. Be with those school chaplains as they seek to speak about you amongst the students in their care. And we pray especially for those countries where there is little resource and little access to education. Help us to share what we have, so that all may grow in learning and in faith and in wisdom. We ask this in Jesus’s name, Amen.