

Sunday 16th August 2020
Worship at Home

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like a summer rain which restores the parched earth.
It is like a cool breeze at the shore of a lake,
at the top of a mountain or through a crowded city street.
God meets us here.
We have gathered to worship the Maker of Our Days,
the Restorer of Our Souls and the Breath of Our Lives.

Hymn StF 608 [All praise to our redeeming Lord](#)

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by his grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek his face.

Prayers

Holy One of Israel, covenant-keeper,
you restore what is lost, heal what is wounded,
and gather in those who have been rejected.
Give us the faith to speak as steadfastly as did the Canaanite woman,
that the outcast may be welcomed
and all people may be blessed. **Amen.**

When we try to go it on our own, fear to trust you, fail to seek divine wisdom,
Lord have mercy.

Silence

When we have not recognized God at work in the faith of others,
Christ have mercy.

Silence

In all that we have done and all that we have left undone,
Lord have mercy.

Silence

God calls each of us by name and cries out with tears of joy as we recognize
God in our admission of need.

Praise God—who welcomes us as we are, challenges us to let go of our guilt
and provides a way for us to walk on together. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 416 [There's a wideness in God's mercy](#)

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness in the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice
Which is more than liberty

Bible readings:

[Genesis 45: 1-15](#)

[Matthew 15: 21-28](#)

Hymn Stf 565 [Only by grace can we enter](#)

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
You call us to come.
Into your presence you draw us,
And now by your grace we come,
Now by your grace we come.

Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to your grace
we are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

Sermon—Rev John Trevenna

I want to tell you about Bertie. He is a three year old pure white, golden retriever (if that isn't a contradiction in terms!) He belongs to our daughter, son-in-law, and grandsons. They got him when he was just a few weeks old, and small enough to curl up in the wooden bowl on the table. Now, he is strong enough to pull all of us along, and can put his paws on our shoulders, which he does whenever we visit. No one is supposed to feed him from the table during mealtimes, but I have seen our daughter surreptitiously slip him a morsel under to table! He is, of course, a loved part of the family.

Obviously, I tell you about Bertie because of our reading, and the surprising words of Jesus to the Canaanite woman who came seeking help and healing for her daughter, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” (Matthew 15:26) which is my text for today!

To put this story into context – in the previous section, Matthew 15:1-20, the Scribes and Pharisees come from Jerusalem to Jesus with a complaint that His disciples do not wash their hands before eating – this was a tradition of the elders, not a law of God. Jesus rebukes them, and points out how THEY break the Law itself with their traditions. He calls them “blind leaders of the blind” (v.14), and warns that if one blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into the ditch together! After this conflict with the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus leaves that area, and those people, and goes to the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, where he is met by a Canaanite woman.

So, let us look first at THE FAITH SHE PURPORTED TO HAVE.

She is a surprising woman, first in what she knows, and second in what she purports to believe. She has obviously heard of Jesus, and also knows something of the Jewish religion, and its hope for a Messiah, for she calls out (two words are used here – “she cries out, or shouts, saying” (Matthew 15:22 – “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”) – and she keeps on crying out (v.23). She calls Him “Lord” which might have been just a sign of respect – “Sir”, but she follows it with “Son of David” which alters the whole tone of the sentence – for the “Son of David” is a title for the Jewish Messiah who is expected to come, and which she recognises as Jesus.

She also begins the sentence (English turns the sentence round), by saying “Have mercy on me”. I wonder if you have ever heard or sung “Kurie eleison, Christe eleison” which means “Lord, have mercy”, “Christ, have mercy”. Well here, the woman shouts “Eleison” “have mercy”, followed by “Kurie” – LORD. So she cries out “LORD HAVE MERCY” – KURIE ELEISON – again and again. She acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord and to ask, nay demand (it is an imperative) HAVE PITY, BE MERCIFUL! (Gk. word order – “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David”) And she keeps on crying.

I find this amazing, for surely only the Holy Spirit could have revealed this to her. And the question arises, is this just a formulation of words (perhaps told her by someone else), or is her faith real? How do we know if someone who may say all the right things, has a real living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

So we come to THE RESPONSE OF JESUS.

His response enables her, the disciples, and us, to really understand where she stands in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus knows, but His purpose here is to elicit, to draw out of her, that she really believes.

First, He remains silent, and awaits His disciples reaction. Will they support her in her request, or will they feel that she is not worthy of Jesus' attention, and in fact, was nothing but a nuisance. They think the latter – she IS a nuisance – so please send her away, Jesus, she is just disturbing the peace. She kept crying out after Him.

Jesus seems to endorse the Disciples view – however, He does not send the woman away as they request. The woman, as we have seen, is conversant with the Jewish faith. Having declared that Jesus is the Messiah, she must know that He has come to Israel (the “lost sheep of Israel” is the nation of Israel which needs to be brought back to God by God in Jesus). So He says virtually – “You know who I am, and that I have been sent only to Israel.”

FINALLY, THE WOMAN'S OVERPOWERING FAITH.

She has no answer, and does not contradict Him – but she does two things, she acts and she speaks. She comes and kneels before Him (Literally - “she, coming, worshipped Him”) – a gesture can often say more than a thousand words, and hers is a gesture of submission and supplication – You are Lord, I submit to you as I kneel before you. I also come as a supplicant , and her words reinforce her position before Him, “Lord, help me.”

At this point, and indeed throughout the Ministry of Jesus, we must realise that Jesus knows the end from the beginning. He knows He will die, He knows He will rise again, He knows what is in a person – indeed St John tells us (John 2:25) “He knew what was in a man” NIV. Jesus knew her faith was genuine, but wanted to make it explicit to everyone there, and to us who read these words long after the event.

It has been suggested that Jesus uses a word here for “dog” that means a puppy or house dog, (He does indeed use a diminutive of dog – we might say “doggie” or “puppy”) and therefore isn't being rude or hurtful towards the woman. While this is true of the word that Jesus uses here, it is also true that the Jews called the Canaanites “curs”, and it seems that Jesus here is following the tradition of his fellow Jews in the way He speaks to this

Canaanite woman.

It has also been suggested that Jesus is here testing the woman, to see if she really does have the faith she purports to have, and while that may or may not be true, what is certainly true is that the force of this story lies in the fact that Jesus does not immediately respond to the woman's request, but elicits from her a response of a deep faith in Himself that would not have been apparent if he had immediately delivered and healed her daughter.

The woman knows that Jews call Canaanites "curs", "dogs" when he makes this statement, painting a picture of a family who are feeding their children, and who will certainly not take away from the children in order to feed their pet dogs. She accepts his analogy, and uses it to make her case to him – it just needs a few crumbs from the table, which, of course the dogs will eat up as they fall – that's all I ask, she says, just a few crumbs Lord. Surely it is fair for the family dogs to eat up the crumbs that fall – and that is all she needs from Jesus – just a few crumbs!

This is faith indeed – mustard seed faith which can remove mountains, a few crumbs of bread will be sufficient to meet my needs.

Jesus acknowledges the greatness of her faith, this is actually the first time that He speaks directly to the woman. He has responded generally to the statement she has made, but now He directly addresses her. Jesus says, "O woman" addressing her directly. (I think it is a pity that we omit the "O" which is there in the Greek!) "Your faith is great" "Let it be to you as you desire" (Literal translation).

"And her daughter was healed from that hour".

I would like you to take away from this story the true impact of this woman's faith. If she had just come to Jesus, and He has instantly said, "Your daughter is healed", it would have been a wonderful miracle to add to the others in the Gospels, but how much we would have missed.

The disciples would never have seen the full extent of this Gentile woman's faith, a woman who recognised who Jesus was, and whose outstanding faith brought a blessing to her, her daughter, and is an example and encouragement to all who read it. Jesus says "Great is thy faith" – it is mega-faith (the word used here) because it overcomes all obstacles – including ones that Jesus Himself seems to put in the way.

She realises and accepts that she does not deserve to receive anything from

Jesus – neither do we – not one of us – for everything is of grace – a free gift – unmerited and undeserved.

But she also realises and accepts that anything is possible for those who trust in the Lord Jesus – her recognition of who He is, followed by those three simple words said on her knees – “LORD, HELP ME!”.

Over 60 years ago, I was taken into a College Chapel by a young man of my own age. I had made a mess of many things in my life, and had been a foolish and stupid young man, and he suggested that I kneel at the front of the Chapel with him, and tell the Lord how I felt. I knelt there and simply said, “Lord, help me”. When I got up from my knees, I was in the same situation, but I was a different person in that situation, and, at that moment, I knew that the Lord Jesus had called me to be a Minister of the Gospel, and I have never doubted it since.

Whatever your situation is today, come and in your hearts kneel before the Lord Jesus, who knows you and loves you, and simply say to Him, “LORD, HELP ME!”

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We kneel before you—God of all mercy
We have faith that you will listen to our cry for help
Because you came to this troubled, broken world
Not as a powerful king, but as a self-giving Saviour.
We have faith that you will listen to our cry for help
Because you listen patiently and respond lovingly
Not to the loudest voices—nor the privileged voices
But to any and all who cry out in need and vulnerability.

Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy

We pray for all people who confess to following Jesus Christ
For those scattered in their own homes longing for fellowship
For those whose faith is challenged by new circumstances
For those who are persecuted for their faith
May we be humble, faithful and led by you

Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy

We pray for those who have to beg even for crumbs
We bring to you the injustices and inequalities of the world
We acknowledge that we find it hard to share
We ask you to fill us with your love that moves us to action

Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy

We praise you that every person is made in your image.
Thank you for the creative, dramatic ways Jesus challenged cultures of
exclusion and prejudice.
We pray you uncover our sense of entitlement
We pray you crack open our groups of privilege
Until we can all gather and be fed at the one table.

Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy

We cry out with all who long for healing today for their sons and their
daughters, for themselves and for their neighbours.
We cry out with all who are suffering today.
We cry out with our own wounds and incompleteness.
We cry out with all who grieve the loss of those they love.
We remember those who have died.

Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy.

And in your mercy fill this longing world with streams of your living water,
abundance of your living bread and all the hope and power of your
resurrection. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 611 [Brother, sister, let me serve you.](#)

Now go, to serve as God's people.

We will work to remove all that divides us from others.

Now go, to share the grace of Jesus.

We will love others just as we are loved.

Now go, to be the Spirit's community.

We will live in your light, warmth and fire.

And the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you and remain with you always. **Amen.**