

On Line Worship: Sunday 16th August 2020

Good morning everyone, and welcome to worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. My name is Ruth Dillon and I am the minister of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC and I shall be leading us in worship today. You are all most welcome.

Our opening words are taken from ***Psalm 67;1,3***

*May God be gracious to us and bless us,
and make his face to shine upon us
Let the peoples praise you
O God let all the peoples praise you*

The theme for today's service is '**For all People**' and listening and learning to the voice of the outsider.

However, let us pause and put aside the distraction of the moment,
To be still before our God
To abide in the shadow of God
To be with the God in whom we trust.

Opening music Organ Music Nessie Black, Fleet URC

Call to worship

Leader As we come before the Lord,
let us be aware of the abundant blessing
bestowed to us

**All Bring us to your holy mountain,
that place of worship
where you receive what we have to offer:
our praise, our prayer and our lives
given in service to you.
Amen.**

Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

As we say our opening prayers, there is a response within our prayers of confession, when I say the words ***Forgive us Lord***, can you respond my saying **for missed opportunities**.

O God, in whom we live and move
and have our being
and make your face shine upon us.
Make yourself known to us
as we approach you in prayer.

Speak to us
through the reading of Scripture.
Move us
as we sing your praise in hymn and song.
Challenge us
as we listen to the preaching of the Word.
Stir us into action
as we offer ourselves again to you.
For we are your people and you are our God

Although we are your people,
we are like children
who are tempted to go our own way.
We pray for forgiveness

For the times when our own selfishness
has spoiled family life for others;
Forgive us Lord ..., **For missed opportunities**

For the times
when we have seen a need for loving care
and ignored it;
Forgive us Lord ..., **For missed opportunities**

For the times
when we have been offered understanding
and rejected it.
Forgive us Lord ..., **For missed opportunities**

Teach us to think more clearly
about our concern for others
and to be guided by your love
in showing your compassion.

.....
*And now let us be silent before God as we open our hearts to seek
God's forgiveness.*

God is the fount of forgiveness,
for you tenderly hold each one of us in your love,
and enable us to be new creations
made in your image

You say to each one of us
your sins are forgiven; yet you also say
Come now and follow me.

And now let us say the prayer that Jesus taught his friends to say

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Readings Now we shall hear today's readings

They will be read for us from two members of Beacon Hill URC

Isaiah 56: 1,6-8 read by Philip Le Fanu

1 Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon
my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.

⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to
him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who
keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my
covenant— ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them
joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of
prayer for all peoples. ⁸Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the
outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already
gathered.

Matthew 15: 21-28 read by Karen Smith

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and
Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out
and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my
daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at
all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away,
for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to
the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt
before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to
take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes,
Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters'
table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let
it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed
instantly.

Reflection

One of the great moral and cultural issues of the last hundred years has been racial identity. The world was horrified to learn that the German Nazis had killed six million people whose only crime was to be Jews.

The world was then increasingly horrified to watch as the apartheid system in South Africa discriminated in hundreds of ways against most of the population simply because of the colour of their skin. And in recent weeks we have seen the 'Black Lives Matter' movement emerge since the murder of the American George Floyd, by a white American policeman on May 25th this year.

In other parts of the world, still to this day radical distinctions between peoples of different races and colour of skin still prevail. However, for many countries, the challenge is on: to take the widespread belief that all humans are equal, irrespective of race and colour, and to make this work within actual societies, where people from very different backgrounds can live together in peace and harmony.

There is still much prejudice, much hatred, and much suspicion to be overcome.

So, when we read this story from Matthew's Gospel in our own setting, we may find it quite shocking. It looks as though Jesus, to begin with, is refusing to help someone in need just because she's from the wrong race, a Canaanite and a woman.

We wouldn't think much of a doctor or nurse who refused to treat a patient because they weren't from the right family background, or weren't the right colour.

It seems very strange.

What's going on?

We are here, once again, at a point where Jesus' fundamental mission is being defined.

He wasn't simply a travelling doctor whose task was to heal every sick person he met.

He had a very specific calling.

What he had come to do is not to abolish the law, but to fulfil it; not to do away with the category of 'Israel', God's chosen people, but to fulfil the purpose for which this people existed in the first place.

The Canaanite woman, who was not a Jew, does indeed have great faith. Not only does she clearly believe that Jesus can heal her stricken daughter, she addresses Jesus as 'son of David,' the Jewish messianic title which the disciples themselves were only gradually coming to associate with him.

This woman was desperate! She may have already taken her daughter to the Canaanite priests and exorcists—our passage doesn't tell us. But we do know that this woman apparently had nowhere else to turn, because this was an extreme act on her part. She, as a woman, was so frantic to secure help for her daughter that she dared to speak to a man in public.

More than that, as a Canaanite, this woman was a member of an ethnic group who were the despised, mortal enemies of the Jews. But in spite of the fact that Jesus and his disciples were Jews, she audaciously and brazenly spoke to a man she didn't know, in public.

Now we know the end of this story, don't we?

We know that God promises, throughout the Bible, that he loves us and that he will take care of us.

Jesus himself, a few chapters earlier in Matthew Chapter 7, rhetorically asks us that if we, as parents, know how to give good gifts to our children, don't we realize that our heavenly Father will give us, his children, good gifts?

He explained that if we ask God for bread he won't give us something inedible and impossible to eat—like a stone.

God is not playing some cruel game with us; he won't give us a snake when we ask for a fish

So with the benefit of hindsight, based on all that God has revealed to us of himself in the Gospels, and the entire Bible for that matter, we can be certain that Jesus, God in the flesh, loved this Canaanite woman.

But when he first started talking to her it didn't seem like he liked her!

This woman approached Jesus and cried: "*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!*"

The Canaanite woman wasn't a Jew, but she apparently knew enough about Jesus to know that he was a healer, and she was desperate —she was willing to try anything.

She was a woman and a Canaanite, so she had to feel extremely awkward in a group with a bunch of male Jews.

She was definitely a minority, and definitely defying social conventions. Her request was for mercy. Mercy!

Today our echoes for mercy are just as strong, when we look at the news and see the inequality, for Black Lives Matter, and for the tensions in the Lebanon. We can only appeal to God for courage in the face of terrorism and abuse of power, whatever the situation, and to listen and learn to the voice of the outsider.

We must always keep in mind that Jesus is the centre of our life, and in doing so, we need to listen to Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman. Even though she is different in every way, he accepts her as an equal.

Let us always do likewise and mirror the action of the God who came to dwell amongst us in Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn Lord, we come to ask your healing,
teach us of love;
all unspoken shame revealing,
teach us of love
Take our selfish thoughts and actions,
petty feuds, divisive factions,
hear us now to you appealing,
teach us of love.

Soothe away our pain and sorrow,
hold us in love;
grace we cannot buy or borrow,
hold us in love.

Though we see but dark and danger,
though we spurn both friend and stranger
though we often dread tomorrow,
hold us in love.

When the bread is raised and broken,
fill us with love;
words of consecration spoken,
fill us with love.

As our grateful prayers continue,
make the faith that we have in you
more than just an empty token,
fill us with love.

Help us live for one another,
bind us in love:
stranger, neighbour, father, mother -
bind us in love.

All are equal at your table,
through your Spirit make us able
to embrace as sister, brother,
bind us in love.

Jean Holloway (born 1939) © 1995 Kevin Mayhew Ltd Tune Ar Hyd Y Nos

Played on the organ by Nessie Black

Prayers of intercession

*There is a response to our prayers of intercession today.
When I say **Your kingdom come O Lord,**
Could you respond by saying **Thy will be done***

God who knows our hearts desires and minds yearning
We pray for those who will go to bed hungry this night,
aching for food and longing for a crumb of comfort...
Your kingdom come O Lord ...**Thy will be done**

We pray for those who steal the food of your children,
with overinflated prices and unjust trade...
Your kingdom come O Lord ...**Thy will be done**

We pray for those who have to content themselves
with the crumbs under the table of the rich and powerful...
Your kingdom come O Lord ...**Thy will be done**

We pray for those who share the bread they have:
wealth, knowledge, help, kindness and compassion...
Your kingdom come O Lord ...**Thy will be done**

We pray for those who cry out for bread for all,
and will not rest until the world is fed...
Your kingdom come O Lord ...**Thy will be done**

.....

*In the silence Lord, we pray for people and situations that we are
aware of that are needing our prayers.*

We finally pray for ourselves Lord.
That what we glimpse of the Kingdom may be seen in our lives,
through our commitment, dedication and love for you
Amen

Closing prayer

As we go out to take God to others,
know that we will meet him in others,
for our God blesses us with his presence wherever we are.
Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Blessing

May the blessing of God
who is truly beyond all human understanding,
remain in our hearts and minds
this day and each day
Amen

Closing music

Organ Music

Nessie Black, Fleet URC

Hymns reproduced & streamed under CCLI 6025 & CCLI 21997 respectively
Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith August 2020