

Matlock 16 August 2020

Call to Worship

Hello everyone it is lovely to be worshipping with you again. Hopefully I've managed to improve the sound quality.

Let's pray

Come, with purpose,
into the presence of the living God.
Come to worship, and to be amazed,
to discover and learn new things.
Come, knowing that God welcomes us all with open arms.

Amen.

(Roots for Churches Ltd)

StF 351 In Christ alone

Let's come to the Lord in song now as we sing - Number 351 in Singing the Faith – in Christ alone – a song that speaks of God's

<https://youtu.be/JWiFYJMGas0>

Prayers

Let's pray

Lord God, as we come before you now,
we open our hearts to you.

Help us to see that we can learn so much from others,
even from those with whom we think
we may not share much in common.

Make us willing to stand out from the crowd,
to hear your voice, and act upon it.

Lord, sometimes we look as though we are listening to others.

We may even make all the right noises!

But we confess that our attention is often anywhere but
where it is supposed to be.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we are too distracted by our own concerns.

We care only for ourselves,

and listen only to those who say what we want to hear.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we don't listen to people

because we don't like them,

or because they are different from us.

Sometimes we have bad or unhelpful thoughts.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we don't listen to you, Lord,
because we are too busy,
or a bit frightened about what you might say to us.
Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities. Amen.
Amen

(Roots for Churches Ltd)

Let's say the Lord's prayer together.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who 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.

Reading: Matthew 15: 10-28

Our bible passage this morning is in two distinct parts and at first you may think that the two sections are unconnected but we are going to explore what connects them this morning and how it can help us connect better with both God and the world around us.

Message

This morning's passages make difficult reading so let's start with Winnie the Pooh and one of his escapades, the one where he tries to trap an elephant or as he mispronounces it a 'heffalump'.

Pooh digs a hole to catch the Heffalump and decides to bait the trap with some of his own favourite food, honey! But here's the catch, he can't bear to leave a full jar in the trap so he eats some himself, with the thought that it is important to make sure that it is honey. It is, but what if it isn't honey all the way down? It wouldn't do to have anything else at the bottom, so he eats a little more. And of course by the time he's quite sure that it really was honey all the way down, the jar is empty....

For Pooh, what matters is what the jar really contains, all the way down. If it's only got honey at the top but something quite different underneath, one needs to know. And that lies at the heart of what Jesus is saying as he comments on the discussion with the Pharisees about the purity laws.

What is the point of keeping all the purity laws?

The Pharisees would say 'in order to be the sort of person that God always had in mind'.

But what sort of person did God have in mind?

One who was pure, not just on the surface but right the way down to the very depths of their personality.

There wasn't anything wrong with the purity laws in themselves, but to stick with the outward laws and ignore the call to be pure through and through was to miss the point entirely.

Jesus' way of making the point was to give them a riddle 'it isn't what goes into the mouth but what comes out of it that makes you unclean'.

What did he mean?

Well, as he explained to his disciples, he was referring to words, his point being that words reveal what the person contains, deep down. Long before psychologists noticed that what people say is an indication of what's really going on inside their thoughts and imaginations, particularly when they're not concentrating very hard, Jesus had made the same point. People demonstrate that they are unclean by what they say and how they treat other people.

So this discussion is really about what God really wants his people to be like and how this desire can be fulfilled by being made pure. Jesus is pointing out that through him, God is offering a cure for all our deep level impurities. Jesus is sowing the seeds of God's kingdom in people's lives, planting plants that will grow and flourish as long as a person remains connected to God. The challenge is to have faith, remain focused on God and his kingdom so that our hearts, our thoughts and our intentions as well as the casual words we utter, reflect God's will rather than our own.

And so we come to the second part of our passage, a hard passage to come to terms with in some ways. Because let's face it Jesus' initial response to the Canaanite woman doesn't read well does it. A distressed woman comes to Jesus and asks for his help and he insults her. People have tried to come up with a range of excuses to explain his behaviour, that he was teasing (really, would you tease the desperate mother of a sick child?) or that to be called a dog wasn't that insulting (oh yes it was).

It does help a little to understand a bit about the relationship between the Jews and the Canaanites at that time. The Canaanites were the ones whom God's people in the Old Testament were told to destroy and cleanse from the land, so she was descended from the original people of the land who were dispossessed by the Israelites. She was the equivalent of a present day Palestinian and we know how well Jews and Palestinians get on even today. So like all Jews, Jesus' upbringing would have led him to want to have nothing to do with her. To make matters worse, she is desperate and so approaches him, shouting like a mad woman. No wonder Jesus initially ignores her completely.

But what is powerful about this story is that she doesn't go away, instead she persists, humbly and despite the insults she kneels before Jesus and in her desperation and faith connects with him. And as that connection is made there is a real encounter for both of them. The woman's faith is acknowledged and her daughter is healed and Jesus who had possibly up to this point understood his mission to be focused on the house of Israel opens his heart to a Gentile.

Jesus may have behaved badly but he quickly learnt from his mistake. And to me this shows that it isn't a sin to be wrong or even sometimes to be prejudiced. It only becomes a sin if we obstinately continue to hold these views once we have been enlightened. This incident may have pushed Jesus' views of inclusiveness within God's kingdom beyond all previously considered boundaries. Not only to women, but to foreigners and those traditionally thought to be God's enemies can be welcomed in.

To the young faith communities that Matthew was writing to who were largely Jewish but had opened their arms to Gentiles, much to the disgust of their Jewish neighbours this story provides the justification, not just that Jesus healed gentiles but that he connected with them as individuals and was won over by them and their faith.

To us today it is a useful reminder about the need to remain connected with God, to be open to understand what he is saying to us in our changing world including being open to new ideas about his plans for the Church.

It's worth considering how we are conformed by the Church

- How and why do we draw lines about who and what is and is not acceptable?
- How do we deal with people who behave in a way that offends us?

The challenge we face is that we need to be able to identify and deal with things that don't really matter so that we can focus on what does really matter. We need to connect with people and enable them to connect with God.

Let's pray

Jesus Christ, barrier-breaker,
lead us from our comfort zones.

We want to surround ourselves with like-minded people;
help us to be open to those who are different.

Jesus Christ, risk-taker,
free us from our fear of all that is strange.

We are afraid of what we don't know and understand;
help us to see the inclusiveness in your plan.

Jesus Christ, hope-giver,
show us how to be like you.

We don't willingly embrace change,
or always welcome the stranger;
Help us to open our hearts and minds,
so that your kingdom may grow.

Amen.

StF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell

Hopefully our final hymn will help us respond to that challenge as it is all about God's kingdom lived out through the Church and it is clear that it isn't about the physical building but rather the people within and how they demonstrate God's kingdom through the way that they live. Something to hang on to especially now when we can't meet in a physical building but the need for God's compassion in the world is as strong as ever. Number 409 from Singing the Faith – Let us build a house where love can dwell.

<https://youtu.be/gKJgcv8SdnQ>

Prayers of intercession

Conversation about who/what to pray for

Let us pray:

Welcoming God,

we bring our prayers for those who are the outsiders in our society.

We pray for those in poverty,

living on the crumbs and scraps of others' riches.

We pray for those who are denied the basics of living,

food and water, shelter, housing or healthcare.

We pray for those who have no place of safety,

for refugees and asylum seekers who have no home to call their own.

God of the outsider,

we pray that you will bring healing and welcome to all.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Listening God, we bring our prayers for those who are denied a voice.

We pray for those whose voices are silenced

by the denial of human rights and freedom of speech.

We pray for all those who are prisoners of conscience,

suffering because they have taken a stand for justice and freedom.

We pray for those who are excluded and pushed aside,

mocked, insulted or abused for their race, gender or sexuality.

God of the voiceless,

we pray that you will give power and hope to all.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Faithful God, we bring our prayers for all those who struggle with faith.

We pray for those for whom faith is lifeless,

stifled by rules and regulations.

We pray for those who cry out in desperation,
feeling that their prayers are unanswered.
We pray for those who feel unwelcome at your table,
excluded by their own weakness or the prejudice of others.
God of the gospel,
we pray that you will give living, life-changing faith to all.
In the name of the Christ who brings welcome, hope and change,
Lord, hear us.
Lord, graciously hear us.

Let us pray for ourselves:
A new week lies ahead of us and we don't know what it will bring.
Help us to be aware of people around us who are struggling in any way
May we be sensitive to their needs and seek your wisdom as we come alongside them.
Help us to be there for them, Lord
bearing your blessing.
Amen.

(Adapted from Roots for Churches Ltd)

Blessing

Let's share in the grace together.
May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us ever more. Amen