

Worship @ Home

Christchurch and Pirton
Sunday 16th August 2020

Worship leader: Revd Val Reid
Music: Mandy Pye and Mike Crowley
Reader: Janet Tackley
Technology: John Hamblin



Call to worship

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.

Welcome and introduction

Be still for the presence of the Lord

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned

How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

David J Evans

Prayer

Let us pray.

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.

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.

Silence...

Holy God,

we praise you that you are a God who loves.

You have given us a marvellous world,

to live in and to share with all your people.

You, O God, love everyone equally,

and we thank you that we are each unique.

You, O God, forgive us for our missed opportunities,

Our selfishness, our prejudice, our lack of attention.

You offer us a fresh start.

A new way to live.

We thank you that each one of us

has so much to give – and to receive – from each other.

And from you.

Thank you for each new experience that you give us.

Amen.

Matthew 15: 21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Just 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.' But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.'

He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'

But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'

He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'

Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'

And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reflection

Migrants including children arrived in Dover for the tenth day in a row, as the council warned it is 'days away' from being unable to look after any more asylum-seeking youngsters.

At least 4,375 migrants have reached the UK by small boat so far this year.

The Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said the system was being 'exploited by leftie Labour-supporting lawyers who were doing everything they could to stop the Government removing people'.

Her newly appointed Clandestine Channel Threat Commander said: 'These crossings are dangerous and unnecessary, and I am determined to stop them'.

Speaking to reporters in Dover this week, Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage said: 'With all the tough talk and with it happening every day, it's becoming a bit of a national humiliation.'

A small inflatable boat is bobbing in the English Channel.

It should hold 2 or 3 people.

There are 15 on board.

They are desperately scooping water out of the sinking boat with their cupped hands.

They have nothing to eat or drink.

One of the women on board is eight months pregnant.

Three of them are toddlers.

Journalists are filming them from the comfort of their own motor launch.

A helicopter hovers overhead.

The woman is trying to hide her face.

The children are crying.

How do we view the daily tragedy that is being played out on the south coast of our country?

Are these invading hoards?

Or are they the human casualties of war and famine and cholera and social breakdown in Yemen and Syria and Eritrea and Sudan?

Are we full up?

Do we want to send the Royal Navy out to turn them back?

Or do we want to help them ashore, find them a room to sleep in, take them a food parcel?

How do we look at other people?

Do we look at other people?

Really look at them?

Or do we see them as a threat to our security?

A challenge to our theology?

A problem to be solved?

I really love this little story from Matthew's gospel.

It's in Mark's gospel too.

In both gospels it's a turning point in Jesus' ministry.

The Canaanites were the tribe already living in the Promised Land when the people of Israel arrived and settled there.

The Israelites saw them as their archetypal enemies.

Aggressive.

Possessed by demons.

The thing that stood between them and the life they thought God had promised them.

The identity of the people of Israel is built around not being like them.

Not marrying them.

Not worshipping their Gods.

Not eating their food.

Until chapter 15 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus has been travelling and teaching and healing in Jewish territory.

But after his dispute with the pharisees, Jesus heads into a gentile area, Tyre and Sidon.

Here he has this encounter with a local woman, asking for healing for her daughter.

Jesus is the son of God.

But Jesus is also a Jewish man of the 1st century.

A product of the assumptions and prejudices and cultural mindset of his time and his tribe.

His initial response is to ignore her.

When she persists, he tells her that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

When she kneels in front of him, he calls her a dog, a typical anti-Gentile insult.

It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.

But she answers him with wit, and with a generosity of spirit that makes him stop and think.

Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.

For a moment, time stands still.

Suddenly this is no longer a Canaanite, an enemy, an outsider.

This is a person, and individual, a woman with a voice and a story and a sick daughter.

A woman who is engaged in a debate for the soul of Jesus's mission.

What am I called to do?
Who am I called to serve?

His perspective is shifted.
His mind is changed.
This woman.
This woman in front of me.
This woman in need.
She is my mission.

Personal encounter trumps theory and theology and culture and upbringing.
You are seen.
You are loved.
Your daughter is healed.

This woman without a name is doubly an outsider.
By race.
And by gender.
Yet she is a person.
She is unique.
She is loved by God.
She is included.

You may have walked down Bedford Road past Christchurch in the last couple of weeks.
Although the building is still shut because of lockdown, there is something rather exciting going on there.
On the railings along the street is our summer poster exhibition.
It's part of the '100 Great Black Britons' campaign.
It celebrates rappers like Stormzy, sportswomen like Jessica Ennis-Hill, Politicians like Diane Abbott, even
Methodist Local Preachers like Paul Boateng.
If you haven't been to have a look, do go along.
It's brilliant.
Visit the national website.
Put forward your own suggestions for a poster.
Thank you, Eddy Selby, for all your work putting this together!

In the summer of Black Lives Matter, and all the arguments that have surrounded recent protests, these
posters remind us that we are all people.
Individuals.
With a story.
We all have something to contribute to our community.
These are not just Black Lives.
Just as the woman in our story wasn't just a Canaanite Life.
These are people.
Unique. Loved by God.

Our experience of Lockdown has invited us to think again about what it means to be church.
What it means to be the body of Christ in this place.
What it means to share in the Missio Dei – the work of God here in Hitchin.

Even Jesus had moments when he was invited to think again about his mission.
And mission is always bigger, wider, more inclusive than we ever thought.

So what are we going to do about it?
Amen.

Christ be our Light

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people
Light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice. *Christ, be our light!*

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed. *Christ, be our light!*

Longing for shelter, many are homeless

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us Your building, sheltering others

Walls made of living stone. *Christ, be our light!*

Many the gifts, many the people

Many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another

Making Your kingdom come. *Christ, be our light!*

Bernadette Farrell

Prayers for ourselves and others

Let us pray...

The Canaanite woman sought your help.

She loved her daughter so much, she was so desperately in need, that she wouldn't give up till she had her answer.

We pray in faith.

Hear us and answer our cry.

Lord, may we learn from this woman, to wait on you expectantly, patiently, persistently, doggedly.

Grant us the courage of our convictions when we truly believe we are doing your will.

We pray in faith.

Hear us and answer our cry.

We pray today for those who feel excluded, whatever their situation, whatever the reason:
for prisoners, refugees, the homeless;
for the sick, the mentally unwell;
for those who have been isolated during lockdown;
for those who feel that they are outsiders.

We pray in faith.

Hear us and answer our cry.

We pray for ourselves when we feel a long way from God,
When we feel alone,
when we feel we don't belong.

We pray in faith.

Hear us and answer our cry.

I invite you to sit quietly for a minute or two.
What do you really want God to do in your life?
Listen out for your deepest needs... they may be buried pretty deep.

Imagine you are the Canaanite Woman.
When you know what you want to ask for, kneel at the feet of Jesus.
You may want to actually kneel.
You may want to imagine kneeling in your mind's eye.
Do not give up praying until you feel a peace, a sense that Jesus has heard you.
Then listen out for his answer.

Silence...

You may want to write down the answer you have heard.
You may want to place an object by the screen, as a reminder.
If you don't feel you have had an answer, keep praying.
Don't give up.
Keep listening.
Sometimes we speak far too much, and listen far too little.
Whatever the answer, tell Jesus that you accept it with gratitude.
Speak Lord, for your servant hears you.

Lord's prayer

I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.
Use whichever version you are familiar with.
Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.
Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.
Our Father in heaven...

Blessing

We go out today,
renewed and strengthened in faith,
ready to serve you, Lord.
Help us to find you in the people we meet,
and in our own minds and hearts.
Lead us, good Lord.

Amen.

The Splendour of the King

The splendour of the King,
clothed in majesty
Let all the Earth rejoice
All the Earth rejoice
He wraps himself in light
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

*How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God*

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end
Beginning and the end
The Godhead Three in One
Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb

How great is our God, sing with me

Name above all names
Worthy of all praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

How great is our God, sing with me

Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash and Jesse Reeves

Some prayers are from Roots (16.8.20)

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