

Call to Worship

For our call to worship today, we first listen to verses set for today from Proverbs chap. 22 and then a contemporary call to worship based on today's Psalm – 125 and our reading from James

"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all."

We can trust God.

God is like the mountain: rock solid.

God loves all the people:

the poor, the disabled, the outcast, the stranger.

We can depend on God.

God feeds the hungry, heals the sick, and restores relationships.

Praise our Loving God.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2012, © 2011 Abingdon Press.

Hymn Inspired by love and anger

From Church Hymnary, © WGRG, The Iona Community

Inspired by love and anger,
Disturbed by need and pain,
Informed of God's own bias,
we ponder once again:
'How long must some folk suffer?
How long can few folk mind?
How long dare vain self interest
turn prayer and pity blind?'

From those for ever shackled
to what their wealth can buy,
the fear of lost advantage
provoked the bitter cry,
'Don't' query your position!
Don't criticise your wealth!
Don't mention those exploited
by politics and stealth!

From those for ever victims
of heartless human greed,
their cruel plight composes
a litany of need:
'Where are the fruits of justice?
Where are the signs of peace?
When is the day when prisoners
and dreams find their release?'

God asks, 'who will go for me?
Who will extend my reach?
And who, when few will listen,
will prophesy and preach?
And who, when few bid welcome,
will offer all they know?
And who, when few dare follow,
will walk the road I show?'

Opening Prayer (Elsa Tamez, amended)

Holy One, we are here, eager to discern your will for us and to grow in our faith. Open our minds so that we can explore new ideas and dare to dream new dreams. Open our ears to drink in the experience, wisdom and feelings of others. Open our hearts so that we can be moved in unexpected, fresh ways. God, we realise it is very easy to slip into complacency and just coast along, so we ask you to use your Word with us today to heal our wounds and trouble our hearts where we have become too comfortable. Help us to be powerful doers of your word and not just hearers only. Amen.

The Prayer of Faith – (James 5:13-18)

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. Receive the promise of grace and the assurance of pardon – Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Your sins are forgiven for his sake. Amen

Offering

You are reminded to send in your gifts for the work of the church.
Holy One, receive our gifts by your grace.
Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

Talk

Song – Jesus loves me here and now (Tune: Jesus loves me, this I know)

Jesus loves me here and now,
walks beside me anyhow,
though I'm far from Galilee,
still he loves and cares for me.

Yes, Jesus loves me

Yes, Jesus loves me

Yes, Jesus loves me

Wherever I may be.

When I'm hanging out with friends
or despair on me descends;
confident, or tense with fear,
Jesus, always, lingers near.

Yes, Jesus loves me...

by John Campbell © 2016 Kevin Mayhew Ltd

Children leave for Sunday Club

Readings: James 2:1-10, 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

Do not show partiality James cautions us – “do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” Today's readings from Proverbs tell us the same and yet, does not Jesus show favouritism with his harsh words to the Syrophenician woman? The food is only for the Jews – the children of Israel, everyone else are dogs and they don't deserve any. I think this is the only time in the Bible when Jesus is rude to someone, and in modern language we'd call it racist, as what he has against the woman is her race and her religion. She is a Gentile, a Greek – ethnically different to Jesus, not Jewish, even worse she is quite probably a pagan as the term 'Greek' implies that. This is a very strange story, as we have the other story of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman at the well and it was well known that Jews didn't mix with Samaritans, but we never even hear about Syrophenicians anywhere else in the New Testament, so it seems to me unlikely that the Jews disliked them more than they disliked Samaritans. Although the degree of prejudice doesn't really matter. What matters is that Jesus essentially tells her to get lost because she's not Jewish, and she takes him to task about it, so that he relents and gives her what she asks for.

There is no escaping the ethnic slur built into the word “dogs”. Jesus may have had little interaction with Gentiles for the reason given in Matthew 15:24: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” but he has now deliberately, we must presume, travelled to Gentile territory in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Why did he go if not to preach and teach and heal the people there as he had been doing elsewhere? And yet we are told that in Tyre he did not want anyone to know he was there. This may be part of the is he or is he not the Messiah (or is he just a very naughty boy!) theme that runs through Mark’s gospel, and part of the struggle throughout the gospel of the more Jesus tells people not to talk about who he is and what he has done, the more they proclaim it. This chapter ends with - “Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.” But back to the woman.

Jesus does not flatly refuse her request, but he does prioritize “the children”, as in children of Israel, as primary beneficiaries of his largesse. In antiquity a child occupied a place of complete vulnerability, but even children were fed before lapdogs. While we reel from this affront, the Syrophenician woman manages to think of just the right come-back, twisting Jesus’ words to deliver the retort best suited to her situation: “Sir, even house-dogs under the table get the children’s scraps”. Her acknowledgement of Jesus’ superiority, the implied acceptance of his insult, the lowering of self beneath the table, the subtle shift in Greek from one term for children to another that blends immaturity with servanthood, acceptance of whatever crumbs he might give: all these elements anticipate Jesus’ own definitions of discipleship in later chapters of Mark – the first shall be last, and one needs to be like a child to receive the kingdom of God. And it goes along with Jesus’ own lowering of himself to the status of a servant when he washes the disciples’ feet. These well-chosen words cause Jesus to pause and re-assess. “For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter,” he says. And she does leave and finds her daughter healed. No more talk – no thanks from her, no conversion, no proclaiming of Jesus’ miracles and greatness as happens in the second part of the reading with the deaf man, but the woman gets what she asked for and Jesus is pulled up short.

For those of us who are used to having a place at the table, perhaps we also need to be pulled up short - to be reminded that none of us has any right or privilege to claim with God. “The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all.” We all come as beggars to the table, and it is solely by God’s grace that we are fed. Perhaps we need also to be reminded that God’s table is immeasurably larger than we can imagine – there is

food, and grace and healing enough for all, whatever race, children and dogs (Dexter was pleased to hear this!)

In may happen only once, but Jesus' offensiveness is a fact that we must face. As liberal Christians we may want to resist the notion that a socially progressive, revolutionary Jesus, who changed the status quo in so many ways, would say what Mark ascribes to him or, worse, that the Gentile woman so insulted would accept the slur. We saw not too long ago that when England footballers were racially abused, they didn't take it lying down – they proclaimed publicly that their race did not define them. Though we still often find that women will take a submissive stance for self-preservation, or to get something they need for their children. In most cases, there is no depth to which a mother will not stoop to get what her child needs. And sadly, we see women in Afghanistan returning to wearing the burka as a pre-emptive, protective measure now that the Taliban are back in control. But perhaps, the deeper question from this gospel, is whether we can follow a Christ so repulsive as to die by crucifixion – a fact neither Jews nor Muslims can understand – how could the Christian God let himself be so humiliated and reduced as to die a mortal in the most horrendous manner possible? Jesus flummoxes and confuses everyone who tries to box him into conventional expectations: the pious scribes and Pharisees, his own family who think he has gone out of his mind, his disciples, and even the Syrophoenician woman. If we, too, are not gobsmacked by this Jesus, it is probably a safe bet that we have domesticated Jesus and watered-down the gospel to make it more to our taste. And watered down anything is not as good as the hard stuff!

Hymn Unwanted interruption (The church's one foundation, R&S 566)

Unwanted interruption
disturbing hard-won peace;
a pressure put upon you
just when you'd found release;
this woman and her anguish
intrude with honest pain,
demanding understanding,
though seemingly in vain.

Did pressures of the moment
prevent a kind reply –
upwellings of raw anger
resist, refuse, deny?
Or did your people's story
of holiness apart,
constrict your way of seeing,
exclude her from the start?

Still, somehow, all undaunted,
she would not be denied;
no sharp-tongued, bitter rudeness
could push her hope aside.
Persistently and wisely,
she turned your words around;
she cut through your resistance,
claimed crumbs could still be found.

And so two healings happened:
her daughter was set free,
but, with new understanding,
you surely came to see
that grace and loving kindness,
if true to what God meant,
must reach to all who need them,
show limitless intent.

Thank God, then, for that woman,
and what she did for you,
the healing she enabled
must touch us, change us too.
When prejudiced or stubborn,
or drained of all our good,
then may we too know healing
to live the way we should

John Campbell © 2016 Kevin Mayhew Ltd

Prayers of Intercession and thanks

God of love and power, hear our prayers
as we raise our thoughts and our voices to you.
We pray with those who suffer and are sick . . .
God of love and power, **hear our prayer.**

We pray with those who struggle with temptation and sin . . .
God of love and power, **hear our prayer.**

We pray with those who lead and guide others on the journey of faith . . .
God of love and power, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the world and its leaders . . .
God of love and power, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for environmental campaigns and climate change activists . . .
God of love and power, **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for those who are cheerful
and who bring joy to our lives . . .
God of love and power, **we give you praise.**

We give thanks for those who are loving and kind . . .
God of love and power, **we give you praise.**

We give thanks for those who serve and lead us in our journeys of faith . . .
God of love and power, **we give you praise.**

We give thanks for this earth and its bounty . . .
God of love and power, **we give you praise.**

We give thanks for Christ's grace in our lives, and for the presence of God in our world . . .
God of love and power, **we give you praise.**

God of love and power, make our eyes and our hearts more open to the needs of others,
especially the hungry, the hurting, and the poor.
Help us to see that in caring for the Earth, we are also caring for one another.
And help us, O Lord, to live in ways that promote respect,
compassion, justice, and peace for all people,
and for all of your broken and yet beautiful creation,
as hearers and doers of your holy Word. Rich and poor, citizen and refugee, respected and
despised, all created equal by You. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn 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 pow'r 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!...

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the heart that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another
Making your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light!.

Blessing from 'The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works is Dead, by Elsa Tamez, adapted from a eulogy given by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1965

Holy One, help us not to remain indifferent and silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows. We pray that we do not ignore the basic oppression that we participate in, ignoring what stares us in the face because life is much more comfortable and convenient that way. Give us the courage to stand amid social evil and serve as a headlight – a powerful voice, not a weak echo. Help us to substitute courage for caution, clarity for confusion. Deepen our faith so that we may work passionately, unrelentingly to bring good out of evil. Give us the power we need. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love. God, guide our feet once again to demand justice and to stand for love. Amen.