

Christ Church, 18 Sept. 2022.

**Call to worship**

Sing to the Lord, bless God's holy name;  
tell of God's care for us day by day.  
Declare God's glory to all who will listen  
his marvellous works among all the peoples.  
For great is our God, and greatly to be praised.  
We join to worship our amazing God!

**Hymn** Sing to the Lord a joyful song R&S 77 (tune *Gonfalon Royal* at 136)

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,  
lift up your hearts, your voices raise;  
to us his gracious gifts belong,  
to him our songs of love and praise.

For life and love, for rest and food,  
for daily help and nightly care,  
sing to the Lord, for he is good,  
and praise his name, for it is fair.

For strength to those who on him wait  
his truth to prove, his will to do,

praise ye our God, for he is great,  
trust in his name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above  
cheer those who love his sweet employ,  
sing to our God, for he is love;  
exalt his name, for it is joy.

Sing to the Lord of heaven and earth,  
whom angels serve and saints adore,  
the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
to whom be praise for evermore.

J.S.B. Monsell

**Children's Time – Sandy, Sunday Club promotion**

**Prayer for Sunday Club**

**Gifts**

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,  
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

**Hymn** May God's blessing Red folder 69

May God's blessing be upon you now,  
may you know of His great love for you.  
May God's blessing be upon you now,  
right where you are.

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Chris Kipling

**Prayer and Declaration of Forgiveness**

From the URC Prayer Handbook p59

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Ever-faithful God, whose being is perfect righteousness:  
reconcile us through your Son with the helpless and the needy,  
with those we would ignore or oppress,  
and with those we have called enemies,  
heal disagreements and discord,  
that we may serve all people as your hands of love,  
and sit at the feet of those who need our compassionate care. Amen.

Remember that God forgives us and gives us the grace to change our lives.  
Have courage, forgive yourselves, listen at the feet of Jesus and learn through his example  
compassion and understanding. Amen

**Hymn** Praise the one who breaks the darkness Tune *Blaenwern* at R&S 95

Praise the one who breaks the darkness  
with a liberating light.  
Praise the one who frees the prisoners,  
turning blindness into sight.  
Praise the one who preached the Gospel,  
curing every dread disease,  
calming storms and feeding thousands  
with the very bread of peace.

Praise the one who blessed the children  
with a strong yet gentle word.  
Praise the one who drove out demons  
with a piercing, two-edged sword.  
Praise the one who brings cool water  
to the desert's burning sand;  
from this well comes living water,  
quenching thirst in every land.

Praise the one true love incarnate:  
Christ who suffered in our place.  
Jesus died and rose for many  
that we may know God by grace.  
Let us sing for joy and gladness,  
seeing what our God has done.  
Praise the one redeeming glory,  
Praise the One who makes us one.

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**Bible readings:**        **Jeremiah 8:18-9:1**  
                                  **Mark 7:24-30**

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, while I was on study leave, I read a book I've wanted to read for some time – *Being Interrupted* on re-imagining the church's mission. A large part of the book is taken up with five stories from the Bible showing how Jesus was interrupted at times and how those encounters changed him. Last time I was here we looked at the story of the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Today we are going to look at another story concerning a woman on the margins of society. A Gentile, the

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Syrophoenician woman. Someone from a different ethnic background to Jesus. It is the one time we have in the Bible of Jesus being inappropriate, of using a racial insult.

Jesus is far from home. He is 'up north' about as far from Galilee and Jerusalem as he could get. And he's hoping to go unnoticed for a while; have a break from the crowds. He entered a house and didn't want anyone to know he was there, but he could not escape notice. A woman comes and begs him to heal her daughter. Remember the story of the other woman, it interrupted the story of Jairus begging Jesus to heal his daughter, and Jesus went straight away to that Jewish leader's house. But in today's story, Jesus appears unmoved. She is a Gentile, she is not part of the Jewish people. She is not Jesus' concern. Not only does he not put her off in a polite or diplomatic way, he calls her a dog, which was well-known at the time as an insult. But the woman will not take 'no' for an answer. She takes Jesus' demeaning insult and turns it around on him – 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' And for saying that her daughter is healed.

Jesus is in the region of Tyre. He is the foreigner, the stranger, in the woman's land, and yet in Mark's Gospel that focuses on Jesus and his actions, she is the ultimate outsider – a woman and a Gentile. This is a hard story for us to hear. We think of Jesus as the ultimate good guy. He is human in every way and yet without sin. He is not supposed to be a racist, and yet on this one occasion at least, he is. Biblical commentators fall over themselves trying to get around this, but what Jesus says to the woman uses a term of racist abuse. He calls her and her daughter dogs. This was a term in common usage when Jesus was alive and growing up, but we are rightly shocked to hear Jesus using it. Yet the woman seems unfazed. She is first and foremost a mother. What she wants most for her child is healing and she will do whatever it takes to get it, and endure whatever it takes to get it. (story in the paper recently from a mother about her teenage daughter who died). So, she replies to Jesus and turns his words around in a way that allows no room for a further comeback or put down. And Jesus declares that her daughter is healed. Is this healing, like that of the woman who had been bleeding, caused by the woman's words and initiative, without Jesus' conscious decision? Or has this woman actually changed Jesus' mind?

Here are some reasons why it might be that Jesus has changed his mind. This encounter takes place at the geographical edge of Jesus' ministry. He goes there hoping to escape. After this exchange with the local woman, he turns around and goes back to Galilee. He makes a 180 degree turn, back to where he had come from.

There is also the image of feeding with the crumbs under the table. On either side of this story, this interruption, are stories of Jesus feeding people, where bread in his hands feeds thousands. In Mark chapter 6, Jesus feeds five thousand and there are 12 baskets of

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leftovers. In chapter 8, he feeds 4 thousand and there are 7 baskets of leftovers. The number 12 stands in, repeatedly throughout the Bible for the 12 tribes of Israel, in other words the Jewish people. Seven is the number of completeness, of totality, of all creation. There is a strong suggestion that Jesus has moved from feeding only the children of Israel to feeding a crowd that includes Gentiles. Jesus says to the disciples in chapter 8, 'When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' And they answer 12. 'And the loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?' And they said 7. 'Then he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'

We may think this is all a bit silly, but people at the time of Jesus knew what these numbers meant and represented. It said something significant to them.

As with the woman who had been bleeding, this Syrophenician woman not only interrupts Jesus, she interrupts and disrupts the power dynamics and social norms of her society. For a Gentile woman to interrupt Jesus, to answer back, is radical, brave and risky. For Jesus who holds all the power and privilege in this exchange, to be receptive to what she has to say and to change his mind is a countercultural and transformative move. In order for this moment of transformation to take place both Jesus and the woman have to move out of their comfort zones and refuse to accept the roles society gave them.

Some commentators point to this story as an argument for inclusion, but it is more than that. In conventional models of inclusion, those with power and privilege choose to include those without, but here Jesus is not choosing to include the woman, indeed he initially rejects her, it is the woman who choosing to draw Jesus into her worldview and Jesus responds to that. She offers Jesus, and us, an alternative vision; another better way of being inclusive; of first walking alongside people in need and hearing their stories, before assuming we know how we can best help them. As good Christians, we want to reach out to those around us and help them – giving to charities, collecting food for food banks, thinking how we might be able to help people in the cost of living crisis and with not being able to heat their homes, but perhaps we need to take a step back and think what might we be able to do about the root causes of some of these issues – or as the well-known story goes, give a man a fish, you feed him for one day; teach him how to fish and he can be self-sufficient and eat for the rest of his life. In a country, our country, not some poor country far away, when millions need the help of food banks, should the church not have something to say about the proposal to pay well-paid bankers even bigger bonuses?

**Hymn** Unwanted interruption (based on Mark 7:24-30) Tune at 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.

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**Lord's Supper**  
**1 Timothy 2:1-6**

We remember, as we come to this table, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**And also with you.**

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.  
You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.  
You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations,  
and the gathered wisdom of many years.  
You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up  
in difficult times where there was little peace.  
He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.  
He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.  
He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.  
For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.  
And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.  
You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,  
to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.  
For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people  
on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord**  
**God of power and might,**  
**heaven and earth are full of your glory.**  
**Hosanna in the highest.**

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**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,  
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,  
and we may be ready to live for you  
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. Amen

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Sharing of bread and wine**

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.  
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.  
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living  
may be part of the life of your kingdom,  
and that our love may be your love  
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Holy God, on this the last day of national mourning before the Queen's funeral, we pray for her family as they mourn the loss of a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. We also pray for our nation, losing someone who has been a constant in our lives for most of our lives. We pray for the government and elected officials that they may move quickly yet with wisdom and justice to deal with the many issues affecting us.

We pray for peace in Ukraine and that the recent military gains will lead towards an end to war and not attract an even more brutal response from Russia. We pray for all unstable places marked by violence and those places suffering the effects of climate change with floods, storms, heatwaves and rising sea levels.

Lord, so many days, we are like the blind beggar in Mark's gospel,  
sitting on the side of the road hoping to hear the sounds of your coming.  
We are like the Syrophenician woman begging for the crumbs that fall from your table.  
We are like the woman who was sick for so many years  
who reached out to touch the hem of your garment.

Father, have mercy upon us when we cannot see how we will make it,  
Have mercy when we are sick and cannot get well,  
Have mercy when life hardens our hearts  
and makes it difficult for us to love, to heal or to forgive,  
Have mercy when persecution comes and when we are misunderstood.  
Holy One, we come this morning asking for strength to get to the other side,  
and grace to represent you well and do your will.

We come, confident that your promise to be with us always is true,  
confident that you are greater than the trials we face,  
confident that we are secure in the palm of your hands.  
We come to you today, like the Syrophenician woman knowing deep down that you love us –  
all humanity, created in your image  
And so we pray for ourselves and others,

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We pray this day for all those who face illness and because of it, stress and anxiety.

We pray that you would provide your healing touch for all of us, and especially those known to us in this congregation who are ill and in hospital at the moment.

We pray that you would be with us when we are anxious and fearful and provide a sense of your quieting and steadying peace and we pray for all with all those who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially those within our own congregation.

We pray that you would give us courage to face difficult decisions and difficult days and your wisdom to make the right decisions for our church and our community.

We pray that you would give us the strength of the Syrophenician woman, to question those in authority to bring about justice and equity for all.

We pray that you would give us the courage to reach out in faith, and to accept interruptions and challenges.

We pray that you would give us stamina and strength when we feel overwhelmed.

We pray that you would give us hope during dark days.

Holy One, Give your grace and support to those who fight with and for neglected people. Endorse the work of this church - its children and Sunday Club leaders, all our groups and activities and our upcoming events. Let us be joyful in worship, warm in fellowship, inclusive in outreach, open in decision making, humble and sensitive in evangelism, and gracious in our ecumenical endeavours. In the name of Christ who taught us to pray saying...

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Guide me, O thou great Jehovah R&S 345

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but you are mighty;  
hold me with thy powerful hand.

Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore,  
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
where the healing stream doth flow.  
Let the fiery and cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through.

Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
be thou still my strength and shield,  
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside.  
Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
land me safe on Canaan's side.

Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee

William Williams

### **Blessing**

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that we will work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we will reach out to comfort them and change their pain to joy.

And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that we can make a difference in the world, so that we will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and ever more. Amen