

Christ Church, 4 Sept. 2022.

**Call to worship** (based on Psalm 139)

We've come to worship God,  
who loved us before we were yet born,  
who knows us even better than we know ourselves,  
whose presence never leaves us,  
and whose love for us never ceases.  
This is our God.  
Let's worship together!

**Hymn** Lord of creation R&S 532 (tune *Slane* at R&S 531)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!  
Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!  
Your glory and greatness no mortal can tell,  
and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,  
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfill.  
Your bondage is freedom, your service is song,  
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind;  
rich truth which surpasses my knowledge to find.  
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard  
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your Word.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;  
I praise and adore you for all you impart:  
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,  
your presence to shield me, whatever my betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all,  
if e'er I disown you, I stumble and fall;  
but led in your service your word to obey,  
I walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Winslow

**Gifts**

In the offering of our gifts, as well as the living of our days,  
may we not grow weary of doing what is right,  
but commit to speaking up for the voiceless,  
healing the broken, feeding the hungry,  
and all those mercies which are such a part of your heart  
and your hope for all your people. Amen.

**Opening Prayer** URC Prayer Handbook, p57

**Hymn** O God you search me and you know me Red folder 76

O God, you search me, and you know me  
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze  
When I walk or lie down, you are before me  
'Ever the maker and keeper of my days

You know my resting and my rising  
You discern my purpose from afar  
And with love everlasting, you besiege me  
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord  
You have known its meaning through and through  
You are with me beyond my understanding  
God of my present, my past and future, too

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Although your Spirit is upon me  
Still I search for shelter from your light  
There is nowhere on Earth I can escape you  
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight

For you created me and shaped me  
Gave me life within my mother's womb  
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you  
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new

Bernadette Farrell

**Bible readings:**      **Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18**  
                                 **Mark 5: 22-35**

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. I am going to use those five stories as the basis for worship in the coming weeks, and unbelievably, with the weeks I am Bridgwater Drive rather than here, and with the interruptions of 2 October when we will celebrate harvest and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the URC, and Remembrance Sunday in November, that will take us up to the start of Advent.

Today's story is a familiar one. While I run through the story again, choose one of the characters and try to think how you would feel in that moment, and what difference that moment might have made to you if you had been there:

Jesus – interrupted right in the middle of being an important healer, on your way to save the life of the daughter of one of the local religious leaders.

The woman – unnamed, of course, daring to touch someone with power – a man, a teacher, healer and leader; hoping for healing after many years.

Jairus – being made to wait while you are desperate for Jesus to save your child.

Someone in the crowd – it is a large crowd, so perhaps you are completely unaware that anything momentous has happened. Perhaps you are wondering why you have stopped moving, what's going on, is Jesus going to make it to Jairus' house in time?

Jesus is on the move. One of the leaders of the synagogue, Jairus, is bringing Jesus to his house so Jesus can heal his dying daughter. So, they are in a hurry. There is urgency. A large crowd is going with them, pressing in on all sides. In the crowd is a woman, a woman who has been bleeding badly for 12 years. She has used up all her money paying doctors and still she is ill, no one has healed her. But she has heard about Jesus, how he has healed many people. Might he be the one? Could he finally give her relief? If only she could touch him, she believes he will. She finds him in the crowd, comes up from behind and touches him. Immediately two things happen. She is healed. She feels it. She knows it. And

immediately Jesus knows that power has flowed out of him, but he doesn't know how or why. It stops him in his tracks. It interrupts him, his haste and purpose. 'Who touched me?' he asks. And those around him point to the large crowd and say in the midst of all this how can he ask that. People must be brushing against him all the time, but Jesus knows this is different. He looked all around. He turns. The woman, knowing what has happened, what she has done, falls down before him in fear. Does Jesus kneel down, as he did with the woman who was accused of adultery? Does he sit at her level and look her in the face? We might imagine he does. And she tells him the whole truth. What is that? What does she tell him? We don't know. We are not told. But the Greek word used for truth, is the same as when in John's gospel Jesus says I am the truth. The truth is Jesus' domain, but here it is the unnamed woman who speaks the truth. She presents the whole of it to him and in return Jesus addresses her as daughter – part of the family. Part of God's family. And he sends her away, healed. But Jesus has not actively healed her. His words only name what has already happened.

The unnamed woman goes away, never to be heard of again, after no dialogue and two actions – she touched Jesus, and she told him the whole truth. She might be considered incidental to Mark's bigger story; the accidental cause of the much more dramatic event to come – her delay means Jairus' daughter has died, so now rather than simply heal her, Jesus has to raise her from death. The woman is just a plot device that makes the Jairus story work better. But there is something more important going on. In much of Mark's gospel, Jesus is on the move – busy doing things. It is Jesus who is active, who takes the initiative, who is in charge of events and others respond to him. Now, although Jesus still has the speaking part, it is the woman who takes the initiative, who takes action, and he responds to her. From hearing about Jesus, she looks for him, finds him in the crowd and her touching him triggers a flow of power from Jesus which is beyond his control. Her faith, which he says has healed her, has been in her movement, her touch, her telling, her trusting, her belief that after all these years, all the doctors and healers she has seen, all the wasted money, that finally he will be the one who changes things.

This is a woman we must take seriously because she literally stops Jesus in his tracks. She seriously disrupts not only the story, but also the assumptions of the disciples, of the crowd and of us as readers. What is she interrupting?

She clearly interrupts the narrative, the story. So far, the action has been dynamic and fast paced. Jesus is striding purposefully to Jairus' house, with the crowd jostling around him, until the woman's action brings it all to a standstill.

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She interrupts the flow of power. The power which seems to lie with Jesus and which seems to be influenced by the powerful leaders of the synagogue – one word from Jairus and Jesus has changed whatever other plans he had and follows him to his house. Jairus fell at his feet and begs Jesus to help his daughter, but he clearly thinks Jesus can and will do it. The woman also fell at his feet, but in fear and trembling and tells Jesus the whole truth, confesses what she has done, we might think, but as a woman her words were not considered important enough to be recorded.

She also interrupts the drive to always be doing something; a compulsion towards continually being busy, which I think many of us have, including me, and perhaps we have it as a church – always thinking of how we can get more hall hires, how we can raise money, what new activities we can do to attract people, what new ways we can come up with to help people, without perhaps simply listening to what people want, to finding ways to be alongside people who are lonely, or hungry or can't pay their bills. Jesus was on his way to do something, to solve a problem, to sort things out, until he was interrupted. In the encounter with the woman, he does nothing but listen to her story. By bringing Jesus, and the story, to a standstill the woman challenges the idea that power is bound up in action, in constantly doing things. Though it is interesting to note, that the story does continue, Jesus still goes to the house of Jairus and takes control of the situation and restores the girl to life. We can have meaningful interruptions in our lives that may change our point of view, but then life continues, our work and ministry continue.

This story leaves us with questions – what might we need to change as individuals or as the church to be more open to being interrupted? To working with things that might come out of the blue? To accepting surprises and change rather than always doing things the way they have always been done.

How can we interrupt our drive to being constantly busy?

And how can we also interrupt flows of power? Is it enough to donate food to food banks and support causes on Act435 for example, or do we need to be finding ways to change the structures of power? To fight the root causes, to talk about why the UK has the highest rise of energy costs of the G7 countries and why foodbank use has gone up from around 40,000 people in 2010 to over 2.5million in 2021.

**Hymn** Is it enough to serve (tune *Down Ampney* at R&S 294)

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Is it enough to serve,  
rushing to help, with verve,  
and spend ourselves in lives of active caring?  
Should we not stop and see,  
in Jesus' company,  
if love is better served by our receiving?

Is it enough to play,  
always and ev'ry day,  
the role that others seem to be expecting?  
Should we not risk instead,  
whatever may be said,  
a life that lets our God keep on subverting?

Is it enough to dream,  
of newness that will seem  
to come as if by unexpected magic?  
Should we not stop and be,  
quiet and wait to see  
if God is better served by calm reflection?

Is it enough to care,  
offer our help and prayer,  
but keep our welcome safe within our  
building?  
Might we unleash more good,  
here in our neighbourhood,  
by breaking out of careful church  
constraining?

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### **Prayers of intercession**

Heavenly Father, even as you healed the unnamed woman through your son Jesus,  
heal us of all that separates us from true wholeness with you.

Lord God, no matter our station in life,  
our wealth, health or lack of health,  
you knew each of us before we were even born.

We praise you for wanting to be our God.

Holy Spirit, help us care for people beyond our own families and church.

Keep the desire for mission from dying in our churches,  
for you yearn to grant eternal life to all,  
and life abundant in this world.

Lord Jesus Christ, who was interrupted, who stopped to listen, who allowed your power to be  
transferred and used for good, look with mercy upon all of us in our needs,  
especially those needs we are most reluctant to acknowledge.

Heal us from pride, selfishness, criticism and judging  
and the many unnamed other wrongs we succumb to.

Eternal God, we thank you for the healer, Jesus. We thank you that you care about our infirmities  
and illnesses. We thank you that Jesus was often moved to compassion by the needs of those he  
encountered. We thank you that he reached out to the most needy of his society and provided them  
healing and wholeness. And so,

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 an with all those who mourn the loss of loved ones.

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 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.

Be also with our world. Especially be with all those unstable places marked by violence and hatred  
– (Ukraine, Iran) and those places suffering the effects of climate change (Pakistan, Spain)

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We pray that the world might one day know peace; and we pray for strength and wisdom to be your hands in the world, challenging injustice and bringing hope.

Holy One, Give your grace to all peacemakers. Let your grace support those who fight with and for neglected people. Endorse the work of this church with your enabling grace. Keep it close to the agenda of Christ. 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. And we pray especially today for our Church Meeting, and for Memory Worship which starts on Tuesday, a new endeavour to accompany those living with dementia. In the name of the patient, insightful, and healing Christ we offer these prayers. **Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** God of freedom R&S 625

God of freedom, God of justice,  
God whose love is strong as death,  
God who saw the dark of prison,  
God who knew the price of faith --  
touch our world of sad oppression  
with your Spirit's healing breath.

Rid the earth of torture's terror,  
God whose hands were nailed to wood;  
hear the cries of pain and protest,

God who shed the tears and blood --  
move in us the power of pity  
restless for the common good.

Make in us a captive conscience  
quick to hear, to act, to plead;  
make us truly sisters, brothers  
of whatever race or creed --  
teach us to be fully human,  
open to each other's needs.

Shirley Erena Murray

**Blessing** (inspired by Psalm 139)

Wherever you go this week, know this:

God knows you better than you know yourself.

No matter where you go or what you do,

God is already there,

surrounding you with mercy

and guiding you with love.

So go with joy and confidence,

knowing that God goes with you.

And the blessing of God the Sustainer, Jesus the Redeemer, and the peace of the Holy Spirit

Be with you now and ever more. Amen

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