



'Worship at home'

Sunday August 20th 2023

We come to worship God, who we find in the holy spaces and the ordinary places of our lives, sometimes in unexpected ways.



Opening Prayer

Together we are your people, Lord, and we come to worship you with a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, expectations and hopes. Open our hearts and our spirits, that we are strengthened in our faith, and know your merciful grace. Amen.

Matthew 15:10-20

Then Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand! It is not what goes into your mouth that makes you ritually unclean; rather, what comes out of it makes you unclean." Then the disciples came to him and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees had their feelings hurt by what you said?" "Every plant which my Father in heaven did not plant will be pulled up," answered Jesus. "Don't worry about them! They are blind leaders of the blind; and when one blind man leads another, both fall into a ditch." Peter spoke up, "Explain this saying to us." Jesus said to them, "You

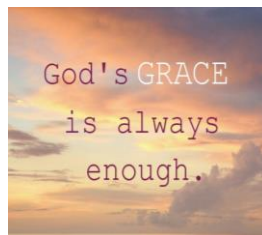
are still no more intelligent than the others. Don't you understand? Anything that goes into your mouth goes into your stomach and then on out of your body. But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these are the things that make you ritually unclean. For from your heart come the evil ideas which lead you to kill, commit adultery, and do other immoral things; to rob, lie, and slander others. These are the things that make you unclean. But to eat without washing your hands as they say you should - this doesn't make you unclean."

The Pharisees held strict beliefs about what was right, which governed how they lived and related to each other. Leviticus and Deuteronomy detail the purity codes which determined what they could eat and how they should do so. It was believed that defying these laws would make them unclean in God's sight, separating them from God. Jesus challenged these laws, teaching here that it is not what we eat that makes us unclean, but our attitudes and how they are expressed in our lives.

What thoughts, attitudes and responses might separate you from God?

...from others?

Name these before God, and seek God's grace.



Prayer of Confession

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear Christ's word of grace: ...God is faithful and just, and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.** *-adapted from Uniting in Worship 2*

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went off to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to him. "Son of David!" she cried out. "Have mercy on me, sir! My

daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition." But Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples came to him and begged him, "Send her away! She is following us and making all this 2

noise!" Then Jesus replied, "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel." At this the woman came and fell at his feet. "Help me, sir!" she said. Jesus answered, "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." "That's true, sir," she

answered, "but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table." So Jesus answered her, "You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you." And at that very moment her daughter was healed.

Good News Bible

What questions does this Scripture passage raise for you, as you read it?

This story of Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman is uncomfortable.

How can Jesus, who supports us in the storms of life and whose provision and mercy are always more than enough, dismiss the request of this mother to bring blessing and healing to her daughter? Does Jesus purposely ignore her request in order to test her, or to highlight her boldness? Does Jesus have a change of heart and realise his mission is wider than he had realised? If we view Jesus as purely divine, was there some greater purpose for his response, perhaps a lesson for his disciples to learn? If we consider Jesus' humanity, was he showing discrimination, or just feeling grumpy and tired of the demands of those around him? This story can be difficult for us to make sense of.

Sometimes, life doesn't seem to make sense. These two passages highlight some of the issues of our world: immorality, killing, lying, stealing, prejudice and racism. Selfish attitudes and injustice are too common. Like the Pharisees, we have traditions and responses that have become entrenched in our society and are potentially destructive. We are trying to make sense of widespread death and devastation on a global scale, as we wrestle with global uncertainty, conflict, financial strain, 3



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manmade and natural disasters, and unprecedented climate change, among others. We struggle to find meaning as we interpret these, even through the lens of faith.

Jesus commended the Canaanite woman for her determined faith. In faith she persisted, despite opposition, advocating for what she believed to be true. She refused to be put off.

**When have you persisted in faith,
in the face of struggles, hardship or rejection?**

The disciples become tired of the woman's persistence. They tell Jesus to send her away because they are tired of hearing her cries for help.

Have the needs of the world around you ever threatened to tire or overwhelm you?

Commit yourself to continuing to pray for the ongoing pain and struggles of those whose situations sometimes seem like they will never change.

Jesus' ministry
was challenged,
changed, expanded
by surprising faith.

A pleading woman,
a Gentile who knows
God is for everyone.

Are our ministries also
expanded by those who
have challenged us?

Jeff Shrowder

<https://thebillabong.info>

Closing: A Benediction for these times

**May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart. *May God bless you with a holy anger toward injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people. *May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy. *May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.*