

Dorset South and West Circuit – Written Service – Sunday 18th September 2022
‘ Faith and Action – Showing & Sharing God’s Love ’ by Revd John Yarrien

Call to Worship:

We come here today not because we are clever but because God welcomes the slow learners.
We come here not because we are wise, but because God loves us in spite of our folly.
We come knowing that the greatest persons will be found among those who humbly serve like Jesus did,
and that the brightest ideas and the deepest truth will come from those who see themselves as little children in Christ’s school.

O Lord, open up our mind and our hearts and enable our lives to declare your praise. This day and forever, **Amen.**

Hymn: - STF 356 – Jesus Shall take the highest honour

Jesus shall take the highest honour,
Jesus shall take the highest praise;
let all earth join heaven in exalting
the Name which is above all other names.
Let’s bow the knee in humble adoration,
for at his name every knee must bow.
Let every tongue confess he is Christ, God’s only
Son.

Sovereign Lord we give you glory now.

*For all honour and blessing and power
belongs to you, belongs to you.
All honour and blessing and power
belongs to you, belongs to you,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God.*

Christopher Alan Bowater (b. 1947)
Words and Music: 1988 Sovereign Lifestyle Music

Prayer of approach

Gather round, all who are thirsty; You who live in desert places, looking for refreshment;

God will give you living water.

Gather round, all who are weary; You who work too hard, looking for respite;

God will give you rest.

Gather round, all who mourn; You who have lost much, longing for healing;

God will be with you in your grief.

Gather round, all who are joyful; You who have much to be thankful for;

God will share in your celebration.

Gather round, one and all; Whoever we may be and whatever we may long for;

God is here and welcomes all.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Your word reminds us that we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.

But we make far too many distinctions, treating one person with more dignity and respect than another. We gladly welcome those who look and act like us, but give a much less enthusiastic welcome to the stranger. Forgive us for the moments when our faith has been empty, for the times that our works have not matched our words.

For our foolishness and our thoughtless use of the gifts of your creation, Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

For our neglect of you, and our failure to care for others, Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

For our selfishness in prayer and our carelessness in worship, Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Silence

Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ. Jesus says: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Readings:

James 2: 1 – 17: - **2** My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. **2** Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. **3** If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," **4** have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?**5** Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? **6** But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? **7** Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? **8** If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"^[a] you are doing right. **9** But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. **11** For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery,"^[b] also said, "You shall not murder."^[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. **12** Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, **13** because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. **14** What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? **15** Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. **16** If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? **17** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Mark 7: 24 – 37: - **24** Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.^[a] He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. **25** In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. **26** The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.**27** "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."**28** "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."**29** Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."**30** She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. **31** Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.^[b] **32** There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. **33** After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. **34** He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). **35** At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.**36** Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. **37** People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Sermon

A Colleague once decided he wanted to test his congregations "Warmth of Welcome". And the preacher happened to be preaching that Sunday on these passages. So, he dressed up in the dirtiest, raggiest clothes he could, somehow disguised himself. Then he proceeded to go into his church. First Sitting at the Back, Then moving around to another spot, Gradually getting closer and closer to the front. It was obvious that a number of his congregation were feeling rather uncomfortable. Nobody spoke to him.

Nobody checked that he had a hymn book or a newsheet. Nobody even said hello, everyone just stood at a distance – not really knowing what to do. There were huddles of stewards at the back, trying to work out what to do. Until just as the 2nd Hymn finished. Dave, the local preacher taking the service, went over, sat down next him, and declared loudly, SO REV PETER, How did it feel in our church today . . . You could have heard a pin drop!

Our readings from Mark and James this morning, vividly remind and challenge us, to think about our willingness to love our neighbours, to show genuine hospitality to strangers that come through the doors here. Rich person or rag & bone man – all are welcome. Our readings challenge us to think about how we put our faith into action, importantly, how we show and share God's love – to all. **Faith and Action – Showing & Sharing God's Love**

Have you ever been in a huge crowd of people, and at the end of the day, you just want to get away from it. To find some space / time to reflect, to collect your thoughts. Well this is how Jesus felt in our passage today. In the middle of the hustle and bustle of going to villages and towns, people clamouring for your attention, for your healing, for your teaching. Jesus just wants some quiet space.

Thinking he had found just the spot to Jesus' clear frustration – the crowd finds him again. In particular this Syrophenian woman, commands Jesus' attention. This woman is desperate. Her daughter, possessed by a demon is in need of help. I've heard that same grief-stricken yearning, that same desperate, desolation, that same pleading, in the eyes of many during this covid pandemic.

If we were in her shoes – and we had heard of this miracle worker, I'm pretty sure we would have done the same thing, sought him out, and pleaded with him to intervene. So knowing that human hurt and despair, it's always a struggle, to hear Jesus', somewhat troubling initial response to her. Which is seemingly uncharacteristically, rough, abrupt, even rude. After all, she comes to him bowed down, in the posture of worship, begging that he cure her daughter of an unclean spirit, something we already know he can easily do. And yet he brushes her off, refusing her request and casting her aside. I wonder . . . In Jesus' resistance to the woman's begging for her daughter's life, we might see our own opposition to just how far God is willing to go, so that all may experience resurrection life.

It is the fierce love for her daughter that moves Jesus, from his initial dismissal, to act. We've no way of knowing if the woman believed herself worthy of Jesus' attention and time, worthy of God's compassion & healing. But one thing was for sure she absolutely believed that her daughter was worthy. She is so convinced that Jesus must and can be the person to intervene. Indeed, Jesus was open to having his mind changed. Jesus was open to being changed. He was willing to be moved. The expansiveness of God's love, God's healing, God's grace will not be limited. The simple fact here is that Mark is strongly telling us the Gospel Truth – that there is room in God's kingdom FOR ALL. All can be saved and saved to the uttermost.

In the passage from Mark, Jesus lets out a breath, some say a Sigh! This sigh is no doubt the exhaustion of being asked to heal over and over again. But it's also the sigh of hope, the breath/inspiration/healing of the Holy Spirit. When I'm in a good place I turn my breath into prayer, breathe in the Holy Spirit, breathe out the stress. But oftentimes my sigh is just an expellation of air, a sound of my complete and entire humanity, an expression of those feelings and thoughts I'm having trouble putting words around. With a breath God created the world, With a breath Jesus Heals the world, With a breath the Spirit engulfs the world with God's Love.

I love the fact that this story shows Jesus being challenged, frustrated, and yet ultimately changed by the Syrophenian woman. Although would not suggest that Jesus is a work in progress, it gives me great hope, that I, a definite work in progress, is shaped in that same image of God's son. In the midst of this

story we see Jesus growing into the one who would lay down his life for all to be saved. It also reminds us that there is always the potential of an unexpected blessing or revelation or insight when we truly encounter the stranger, in Jesus' name.

The next few verses provide another encounter, one that is more intimate and earthy as Jesus heals a deaf man with spit, touch, and word. Jesus exclaims - "Ephphatha" meaning "be opened." The deaf man's ears are opened, and he is able to speak clearly. Jesus' ministry gathers even more momentum and attention as he continues feeding the masses and healing the blind.

The questions I'm left with in this lesson are these: What in me, what in us as people of faith, needs to be opened? Are we willing to risk everything to encounter and follow Jesus? If not, if we're not all in like this Syrophenician mother, why are we even here? Will we, by the grace of God, be given the opportunity, as Jesus was by the Syrophenician women, to be challenged and changed, with our hearts split open in God's Love? There are no borders to God's Love or God's concern for his kingdom people, all the world.

Finally, James says: *You can trust Jesus with your life. What ever he tells you, do it.* This may be just the text, just the story for a start to the church year that infuses a new intensity into our commitment to give witness to the vastness of God's vision, the immensity of God's mission, even when Jesus orders us not to. Rather, congregational renewal comes when we look around us –and how we might leverage our resources to be their advocates before God and the world. So it is by our actions that we demonstrate what we believe. I encourage us all to see how much beyond our imaginations God's love extends. I pray that the spirit of God will infuse us with a new intensity to spread the love and grace of God. **Faith and Action – Showing & Sharing God's Love. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray.

We pray for the Church in every land . . .for this church and for other local churches . . .that we may worship and serve you with reverence and joy. **Silence** - Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the peoples of the world . . .and for the leaders of the nations . . .that all may work together for justice and peace. **Silence** Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who are ill or distressed . . .for the lonely and the bereaved . . .and for those in any other need or trouble . . .that they may be comforted and sustained. **Silence** Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray that we too may lead faithful and godly lives in this world, and finally share with all the saints in everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lords Prayer: -

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us: **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

Go now, and invest your lives in the works of faith. And may God be your defender and provider; May Christ Jesus dispel all that disturbs or disables you; and may the Holy Spirit make you rich in faith and loving and merciful in action. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Be with you all, With those you love, And those you are called to Love, Now in the name of Christ. Amen.

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