

Dorset South & West Circuit.
Sunday 16th August 2026.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.

Written Service.
What's in the heart?



Call to Worship.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Psalm 67:1b

STF 608

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
concentred all, through Jesu's name,
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Prayers of adoration and confession

Heavenly Father we come to you with our prayers of adoration and praise. When we think about your majesty and greatness we are humbled that you seek out our presence and bestow us daily with your gracious gifts. You give us a true sense of peace and joy. You bring harmony into our lives. Such joy and harmony that cannot be expressed. In your presence we experience a wonderful quality of life. When we take time to reflect on your presence and the many ways we experience your creativity in our world, we are overwhelmed by your abundance of love. Truly life spent in your presence Lord, is renewing and so sweet. We bring you our uttermost thanks and praise for the bounty of your love towards us . **Amen**

Heavenly Father you know us so intimately and you see what is in our hearts. Too often we are ungrateful, disrespectful, and what we say is often the opposite of what we want to say. We harbour grudges and are hypocritical in how we behave. We hide within ourselves unclean thoughts and we try to manipulate others and events to our advantage. Often without thinking. Forgive us and recreate us to be more like how you would have us be. **Amen**

Bible reading Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.' Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' He replied, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.' Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us.' 'Are you still so dull?' Jesus asked them. 'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.'

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.' Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' 'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Reflection.

No one relishes being challenged publicly and in the first of these two stories it seems Jesus is not at all pleased about being challenged by the Pharisees, concerning how or what his disciples have been doing, or not doing. It seems those naughty boys haven't been washing their hands before eating. I guess for most of us we grew up being told to wash our hands before coming to the table. So what is going on? Is Jesus

condoning unclean habits? Of course it's not always possible to wash your hands before eating. Many a good picnic has been enjoyed when you just couldn't pop to a bathroom, there wasn't one. Is hygiene the issue here?

Jesus is actually condemning the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, they are so concerned with what was their devise of a ritualistic act and not concerned with what really matters in aspects of faith. The Pharisees would have special reserved water for ritual washing that would be poured over their hands and arms right up to the elbows. The water had to be running and the fingers pointed upwards. They then rubbed the fist of one hand into the palm of the other hand. Any water remaining was considered unclean so they had to repeat the procedure again but with the fingers pointing downward. This was a religious ritual to remove unseen spiritual dirt and nothing to do with physical hygiene. It's OCD behaviour and some! So it's not even about whether the disciples have washed their hands but rather how they have washed themselves and is it according to these elaborate rituals? If not, in the eyes of the Pharisees they were making themselves unclean in the sight of God.

We had to be very careful during the pandemic and many of us would have gone through a ritual washing our hands, possibly singing happy birthday, because it was deemed to give us a good margin for how long to wash. But that was for hygienic purposes in a critical period of time for the whole world. To stop the spread of the virus. This pharisaical way of washing is a sort of compulsive nightmare. Imagine going to a church coffee morning and having to go through the Pharisees way of washing. I don't think the coffee morning would be well attended.

So these ultra high minded holy Joes, invent ways that they think purified your soul before God. They take God's commandments and twist and contort them into the rules that they feel are right and insist that people abide by them. Their interpretation is without compassion, without any kind of understanding for God's way of loving. No wonder Jesus says what comes out of their mouths defiles them.

Sad to say we all get caught up in what we believe to be the right way and expecting everyone to fall into step. Jesus warns that every plant that his Father has not planted will be uprooted. The rituals and rules that we write, that are against God's ways, he will destroy them. Churches along with any human institution has to have ways of governance. In Methodist societies we have the Constitution Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, a huge book that guides how we conduct our practices. Other churches have their own manuals and codes of conduct. We need some form of guidance so that the church acts in accordance with the will of God. The problems occur when we interpret and twist those carefully drafted guidelines to suit our own beliefs and practices.

It's not hard to imagine a Society of faith, such as that represented by the Pharisees, of how easily it could soon become a place of spiritual abuse. Jesus explains that all the hygiene practices in the world can never erase the evil that comes from the heart. Externally being Holy but internally being hypocritical is more than sinful. Jesus quotes one example of their hypocrisy and downright abuse. In a world without a welfare state, without pensions, it was the Sons responsibility to care for his parents in their old age. However the Pharisees had invented a loophole, a grey area. The son could decide that this money was for God and set aside for divine purposes and he would then be exempt from caring for his elderly parents. Allowing his parents to become destitute while maintaining an appearance of piety. Shameful and hypocritical. However we need to ask ourselves whether we easily fall into the trap of saying one thing and thinking another. Looking outwardly holy but we know that we are quite different inside.

This passage makes us really question what is in our hearts? What we expect and why? We are constantly hearing how past ignorance and abuses are being addressed, apologised for and where possible rectified.

It's fairly recent in our history when it seemed perfectly reasonable to accept slavery as normal, apartheid as acceptable, racism as part of life. So we could continue with our ignorant acts of inhumanity. Thankfully we are becoming more enlightened and seeing how we have tried to carve out a comfortable existence for ourselves that dehumanised others. It's a daily struggle not just a historical event. We live with our own selfish ways, our prejudice's and self righteousness. We might think that we keep our own thoughts to ourselves. Outwardly we are loving, forgiving, accepting but only we know what is in our inner most thoughts. However God knows what is in our hearts and minds. He sees us as we are and longs for us to repent and change. To let go of our hypocrisy and confess, admit our failures and God will forgive and give us the strength we need to be His changed people.

This passage of course is very much about religious institution's and their hypocrisy. Sadly religious institutions, churches, places of faith are still human places with many faults and failings. Archbishop Justin Welby accused the Church of England of being racist. We sadly hear about too many cases of sexual abuse in our churches. Churches should be safe spaces for the vulnerable. All too often we read about how those in leadership positions have preyed upon the vulnerable. Abuse can come in so many different forms one source says, 'Church abuse encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse perpetrated by clergy, religious leaders, or within faith-based institutions.' The last few words makes it clear that we all have the potential for being abusive in how we behave towards others in our church life and with those we encounter in so many different ways. It is saddening that we can so easily lose our way and not realise our words and actions are actually defiling the way that God wants us to share His love. We don't want to be blind guides, but followers of the light that Christ gives. There was a phrase that used to be a watchword and worn on bracelets, WWJD-what would Jesus do? If only we could take a moment, step back and ask

ourselves that question, before responding. In the Quaker community, their mode of governance is known as discernment. One person describes the process as, 'this method really asks you to leave your ego at the door and trust that a deeper wisdom will emerge. This listening involves reason, emotion, inspiration, and hope. Experientially, trusting and being vulnerable with one another, and believing in the possibility of discerning and living according to divine will, leads to positive outcomes.' I like the first statement, 'leave your ego at the door.' So often it's our own ego that leads us astray. I can't imagine that the Pharisees had a low ego. Sadly the term Pharisee is now an insult and means someone is hypocritical, self righteous and thinks themselves morally superior.

Some people will never change and that's why Jesus says, 'Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.' We should constantly guard our words and actions and what we hold in our hearts so we live as Jesus would have us live.

Mathew leads us onwards in the journey for purity in the second story in our reading. Have you ever been in the company of someone who says something that seems so out of character with who you think they are? Their values and beliefs. Maybe its a comment about another person or about an issue that just jars, that seems callous or uncaring. It can leave you feeling uncomfortable. The reaction of Jesus to the Canaanite woman is just such an experience. Not the gentle Jesus meek and mild of our Sunday school images. Matthew's gospel is written primarily for a Jewish audience. So this retelling of a difficult encounter is importantly pointing out just what Jesus' ministry is all about.

They have left the debacle with the Pharisees and walked about fifty two miles to this region of Tyre and Sidon. Where not just a gentile woman has come to find him, but a person deemed by her ancestry to be an enemy of Israel. It's interesting to see that the encounter with this woman happens and then they go straight back towards Galilee. It's as if Jesus knew that this woman needed to find him.

It ties in with the previous teaching about clean hearts. We have the contrast of the outwardly Holy Pharisees and the unholy understanding of what a Canaanite is expected to be. The Pharisees don't revere Jesus but this woman greets him as Lord, Son of David, and asks for him to have mercy upon her.

Jesus still seems in a disgruntled mood. She hangs in and suffers four rebuffs from Jesus and his disciples. Is Jesus still frustrated that even his disciples don't understand his mission? Does he take out his frustration on this gentile woman?

She cries out to Jesus to heal her daughter and is met with silence. Is she being ignored? His disciples want her sent away, downright nuisance! Walking fifty two miles and wanting to be left alone is understandable, but there's more to this. Jesus calmly tells her he was sent to the house of Israel, not a descendant of it's enemies. "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." She stands her ground and says that even the dogs are allowed to eat the scraps from the table. In Israelite homes, dogs were kept outside, but children would often invite the little puppies into the home and feed them. Jews in Jesus' day referred to Gentiles as dogs. Non Jews were considered so unclean that even being in their presence could cause you to become ceremonially unclean. Remember Jesus chose to go into Gentile territory. Now he is teaching the disciples and this representative of the non Jewish community what his ministry about. He has come to save the lost souls of the house of Israel. I guess the Pharisees will easily fit into that position. So taking his eye off his mission is like a Father taking his children's food and tossing it to the dogs. Jesus is also testing the Canaanite woman, she has no legitimate right to his help. Her faith is repaid. Despite apparent rejection, silence and the cultural barriers. She refuses to give up. She shows unwavering trust and Jesus has not only compassion but deep respect for her faith that holds out, despite all odds. Jesus' ultimate response to this woman was one of joy and respect: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." The Pharisees, the representative's of the house of Israel didn't understand or show what faith in God is. His disciples seemed unable to understand his mission, but this outsider understands and her faith is a shining example. She's not even begging for herself but for her daughter who we are told is demon possessed. Definitely unclean in the eyes of the upholders of the faith. What the sickness is we don't actually know. But her request is in sharp contrast to the Pharisees. She is not self seeking, not hypocritical but coming to Christ and recognising who he is and what his mission is about. As we see her tenacity, her pure heart, her faith. May we live such lives of prayer and action, that we hear Jesus speak those words to us too, that we have great faith and pure hearts.

STF 416

There's a wideness in God's
mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for
thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Prayers of Intercession.

We pray for our young people who will be receiving exam results over this week and last week. We pray for guidance and discernment as they prepare for the future. Be with those who may be disappointed and discouraged. Give them the confidence and courage to face the next step in their journey.

We pray for those who are struggling with the challenges of their situations. For refugees and asylum seekers. Remembering home and how life once was and now trying to adapt to new ways and cultural changes. We pray that they will find acceptance and understanding in their new circumstances. We pray for better compassion and understanding of those who we might consider as foreigners and strangers in our country.

We pray for our Circuit and churches. May they be safe places for all people, especially the vulnerable. Help us all to be compassionate and caring. Tolerant of others who think differently to ourselves. Help us to let go of our own egos and to put others first for the gospels sake.

We pray for all in need, and we take a moment to think about those people and situations that have been brought to our attention this week. The media informs us of our troubled world and our community problems. Friends and family confide in us about their needs and difficulties. We remember them and ask that you will be very near to all and bring healing and wholeness.

We join our prayers for others and ourselves together in **the Lord's Prayer**.

STF 661

Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build thy house again;
thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
and all my simple soul devour.

I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone:
to spend, and to be spent, for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
into thy blessed hands receive;
and let me live to preach thy word,
and let me to thy glory live;
my every sacred moment spend
in publishing the sinners' friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
with boundless charity divine:
so shall I all my strength exert,
and love them with a zeal like thine;
and lead them to thy open side,
the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

The Blessing

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him. **Amen.** *Selected verses Psalm 67.*

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