



Bible Reading: Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Hymn: Jesus calls us here to meet him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ModYoPReYYw>

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as through word and song and prayer
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.
2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.
3. Jesus calls us to each other:
found in him are no divides.
Race and class and sex and language-
such are barriers he derides.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

Prayers:

Lord, I come before you and acknowledge that you are King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
I bow before you and recognise you as the one who is able to do great things.
Help me to trust you and listen to your reply as I call out to you. Amen

Hymn: God! When human bonds are broken <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbJXSBOd0>

1. God! When human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.
2. Through that stillness, with your Spirit
come into our world of stress,
for the sake of Christ forgiving
all the failures we confess.
3. You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
4. Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life;
use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.
5. Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God! Encourage and renew!

Gospel

Matthew 15: 21-28 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.

Sermon – For the healing of the nations.

Many years ago, I read a book entitled “The power of positive living” by the author Norman Vincent Peale. The book claimed that self-belief is the first step on the journey to finding inner peace and total satisfaction in life. It is possibly twenty-five years since I read the book and I’m not sure that I have found what he is suggesting, but I still believe that all things are possible with God, and because of that I don’t give up. I get tired, I get frustrated, and I confess to feeling overwhelmed at times, the older I get, the more frequently my prayers tend to be “I’m fed-up Lord, please give me strength to carry on.

I love this bible story, found only in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, but of great significance to the Jesus story. I would like to suggest four brief reasons why.

1. Expect the unexpected:

Up to this point in the gospel story, Jesus appears to be focussing his ministry on the Jews, predominantly men, but now he is confronted by a gentle woman. It appears to be unthinkable that she should be wanting something of what he is offering, his message is for God’s elect, not the gentiles.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks for Christian evangelism is that we start by thinking that nobody wants what we are offering yet look in the book shops at how many self-help books are being published these days, look at the TV schedules and there is a search for meaning in life. That is the business God is in and the work of his church.

2. Afflictions can be a blessing:

I recently watched a TV programme about Rose Ayling Ellis the actress and winner of *Strictly*. She has been profoundly deaf from birth and rather than this holding her back, it has been the platform from which she has built a career for herself and become a campaigner for greater use of British Sign Language.

The Syrophenician woman in the gospel story only comes to Jesus because her daughter is ill, and she is possibly at her wits end, not knowing where else to turn. It is important for us to remember that people often turn to faith when everything else has failed them. Jesus said that he had come to seek and save the lost, is that the mantra for the modern, western church?

3. Christ’s people can be less compassionate than Christ himself:

The BBC One Show started to give “a big thank you” to people on a Thursday evening, I think that it started during the pandemic. It never ceases to amaze me how much good work is going on in the country today and there are times when I think that God is getting on with the work of mission and serving the community while Churches are tinkering with policies and discussing Church closures.

The disciples want to send the woman away, she is being a nuisance in their view, yet, despite his apparent initial cutting remarks Jesus has compassion for her and her situation. How much compassion do we really have for the people of the community we serve? Do we expect them to come to us? Or are we ready to go to them?

4. Perseverance pays dividends:

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again” how often have we heard that comment? Yet I am still shocked by how often I hear, often with mock sarcasm “oh we’ve tried that in the past and it didn’t work” it frustrates me and feel to be a case of “if at first you don’t succeed – give up”.

Whatever our feeling may be to the response of Jesus to the Syrophenician woman, you must admire her tenacity and determination, she fought back and in the end her daughter was healed.

Over the years I have learned never to give up. If the gospel of Christ is still of value in the twenty-first century world, then we must keep fighting, never give up and be positive in our thinking, in our speaking and in our living. I believe that God is working as hard as ever before in the modern world, we need to look at what he is doing, and join in!

A time of prayer

Reflect for a moment on the words of the final verse of Charles Wesley's hymn "And can it be"

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

I approach your throne for the people I know personally that need a special touch from you. I picture them as I place them into your loving hands.

I approach your throne for the people who are shouting out with questions and despair and don't know where to turn. Be their comfort Lord.

I approach your throne for those far from me and give to you their needs, knowing that I can trust you to respond

Almighty God, I come now to pray for Your world. Your world which is full of brokenness, injustice, and inequality. I bring before You the rulers of the world, local or national, and pray that they would remember that all power comes from You.

Almighty God, I pray for your church. I pray that during these times we would unite in worship and service. I pray for my local church, and its ministers/pastors, that they would be strengthened by Your Spirit.

Almighty God, I pray for those known to me and name them before You. And, I pray for myself, that I would be transformed by Your Spirit, and live in the love which You have given me through Jesus.

In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Hymn Lord, we come to ask your healing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbbcjEsiwb8>

1. Lord, we come to ask your healing,
teach us of love;
all unspoken shame revealing,
teach us of love.
Take our selfish thoughts and actions,
petty feuds, divisive factions,
hear us now to you appealing,
teach us of love.
2. Soothe away our pain and sorrow,
hold us in love;
grace we cannot buy or borrow,
hold us in love.
Though we see but dark and danger,
though we spurn both friend and stranger,
though we often dread tomorrow,
hold us in love.
3. When the bread is raised and broken,
fill us with love;
words of consecration spoken,
fill us in love.
As our grateful prayers continue,
make the faith that we have in you
more than just an empty token,
fill us in love.
4. Help us live for one another,
bind us in love;
stranger, neighbour, father, mother –
bind us in love.
All are equal at your table,
through your Spirit make us able
to embrace as sister, brother,
bind us in love.

A prayer of blessing

In the joys, may I celebrate with you Lord.

In the troubles, may I shout out to you with boldness and listen to you in faith.

And in the everyday, may I journey on with you.