**Morning Praise Sunday 5th September 2021**

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**Opening prayer**

Lord, open our lives to your goodness. Open our eyes to your presence. Open our ears to your call. Open our hearts to your love. Open our lips to your praises. Open us to your glory. Amen

**Confession**

God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Let us then show our love for him by confessing our sins in penitence and faith. cf Romans5:8

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you. We are not worthy to be called your**

**Children. We turn to you again.** **Have mercy on us,** **bring us back to yourself** **as those who once**

**were dead but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Luke 15

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

#### **Bible Readings: Psalm 146**

 **Mark 7: 23 – end**

**Cathy’s reflection** Have you ever tried to keep up with celebrity culture? It’s impossible to find out who’s in, who’s out, who’s the current favourite of the papers and who’s fallen from grace. At the moment most of the new people who are ‘in’ are all our wonderful athletes and para-Olympians. We can’t get enough information about them and their lives and incredible courage. Dame Sarah Storey is inspirational.

They are all definitely ‘in’ and totally deserve to be in the limelight, however, celebrities who are famous for having been on TV... such as the X factor finalists from 2 year ago?...well....?

 The question of who was in and who was not, was very closely defined and tied up in the purity laws the Jews had constructed. For the Jews, they were most certainly ‘in’ and the Gentiles were definitely ‘out’; as were many other undesirables who couldn’t possibly have kept all the complicated laws they had created. Jesus however, was beginning to challenge their ideas of who the kingdom of God was really for and what it was about and it certainly wasn’t about showing favouritism or elitism. Jesus came to offer life to all who would receive it. Jesus goes to gentile territory, we’re told for a rest.

 What happens next demonstrates what Jesus was trying to get them to understand, the kingdom of God was for all who would follow. Along comes this very determined woman, and not only a woman, but a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia…..the detail of her origins underlines the distaste. She throws herself at his feet. It is a strange story with this very inappropriate request from a distraught mother to a Jewish rabbi.

 She was a heathen woman, the Gentiles were the lowest of the low, as far as Jews were concerned the only good Gentile was a dead Gentile. It was bad enough that she had come and thrown herself down in front of Jesus. In Matthew’s account, the disciples tell Jesus to send her away. She was embarrassing.

Have you ever been sat on a train and someone gets on who’s a bit loud, you sit there and hope they don’t single you out? Their behaviour is embarrassing and then they sit down opposite and start talking to you like a long lost friend. It’s one of those moments you want the floor to open up and lots of other kind Christian thoughts come flooding into your head!

Let’s be honest, I would have been with the disciples …*’send her away’*. We don’t like embarrassing persistence. We’re told she begged Jesus, and the tense of that word used is continuous, she kept on and wouldn’t stop, she was desperate. And then Jesus spoke to her.

This is where we find the story most shocking. We like to think of Jesus as kind and compassionate, always ready to welcome with open arms the stranger and the outcast. Why is he so rude to her?

‘*It’s not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’*

How many times had she heard her people being called dogs? Perhaps walking through a market place, ‘*Look at those Greek dogs’.*

Some commentators have tried to make it sound like a humorous exchange, and translated the phrase as ‘little puppies’; but somehow I can’t see that this desperate mother would be ready for a spot of light hearted banter. This was the life of her precious daughter at stake. And by saying little puppies almost makes it worse in that it implies Jesus was laughing at her.

When Jesus spoke in that way to the woman, it would have been just what she would have expected from a Jewish rabbi and the disciples would probably have been nodding in agreement with Jesus.

What we don’t get in the text is the tone of voice he used. Was it a challenge to her? *This is what you expect me to say…keep going , prove to me you have faith, don’t give up.*

I believe that this story should have a title ‘hang in there’. It’s about persistence. There’s an old maxim by Thomas Paine which goes ***‘that which we obtain too easily, we esteem too lightly.’***

It’s about not giving in at the first hurdle.

The determination, courage and persistence of all the para Olympians that we have seen over the last 2 weeks should surely inspire us and encourage us, who have life so easy, to step up to the mark and to not give up at the first hurdle when trouble comes.

 Is this what our prayer life is like at times. We feel that all we get from God is a brush off or silence? Jesus doesn’t say much about ***why*** we should pray, but he does teach about persistence in prayer. He gives two parables about persistence and a model for prayer. The assumption is, that we will want to talk and listen to our Father, and this story helps us to realise that he doesn’t want us to give up when it doesn’t seem like we’re getting through.

 Jesus’ apparent rejection of her request challenged her to come back at him and she responds in style. She uses his picture of the dog and like a dog with a bone she doesn’t let go.

*‘Ok, you call me a dog, well the dogs get the crumbs and they don’t give up….just give me a crumb and heal my daughter.’*

She hangs in there against all that was stacked up against her. Her faith in Jesus was growing, it was persistent and it was passionate. Two things happened that day, she was pushed to a new depth of reality of faith and the disciples saw amazing faith in a woman whom they had dismissed.

Jesus praised her faith which was passionate, persistent, perceptive, hopeful and audacious. She knew what he had come to do for the Jews and she wanted some of it too.

What does this difficult story say to us?

 Surely, it’s that Jesus encourages us to persist in prayer, he wants us to learn more about the reality of faith, faith that keeps going even when all seems hopeless. It is not saying that when our prayers are not answered, that we haven’t had enough faith or not tried hard enough. This story is also here to show the faith displayed in a Gentile could be just as strong and real as in a Jew. The Kingdom of God is open for all people and let’s not be surprised as the disciples were when we see God at work in those we may not expect.

 This Gentile woman put her faith into action, let’s pray that we too will do the same when we face times of difficulty. We too may then discover that when we persist and continue to hope, we will know that Jesus is our soul’s shelter and strong tower, as promised in Isaiah 30: 18

*‘Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you;   therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;   blessed are all those who wait for him.’*

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

 **We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God

and makes Christ known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord as we look around the world we see so much suffering we can feel helpless.
We bring our cares and worries before you in the knowledge that you hold all of creation in your hands.
This morning we pray for Afghanistan, for the people who are afraid, we pray that they would know your comfort. We pray for all those who are starting new lives as refugees, away from everything that is familiar. We pray for them as they try to adapt to new cultures and new languages and we pray that they are welcomed wherever they go.
 We pray for the people of New Orleans as they cope with the aftermath of the recent hurricane. We pray for those who have lost their homes, and those who have lost family. Lord, when we pray we ask you to give us our daily bread. Help us not to take more than we need, to be ever more aware of squandering the earth’s resources. We pray for all those globally who are suffering from the extreme weather, the recent floods in Europe. Help us to realize that it is our responsibility to find ways to live more lightly on the earth.

 We pray for our children and young people as they start another academic year. Be with those who are starting new schools and universities and those starting new lives in the world of work. We pray for teachers as they navigate the requirements for safety, and cope with their workload.

Help us, through our Christian life to create a society where both young and old, gifted and less able, feel valued and proud to be a part of society.

 Lord, we think now of those in need in our own community and further afield; the elderly, the housebound and those in care homes, hospitals, and hospices. We also remember the victims of violence, abuse, or cruelty. We give thanks for all those who care for the sick within the family, and for all our medical and voluntary services

  We pray for our church, for Cathy and Steve as they prepare for this next stage of their journey, we pray for the churches here in Burton and Shotwick as we prepare for our interregnum. we thank you, Lord for all those who have stepped forward to do extra tasks, and all those who work so hard behind the scenes. We pray for those who face the pain of grief at the loss of a loved one. Help us to support all those who mourn, both with our prayers and with practical help both this day and in the days and weeks to come. We remember before God those who have died and ask that those bereaved by their passing are aware of the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings so much hope. We name before you anyone we know who needs your comfort and healing in body, mind or spirit……….

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer *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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer:**

The Lord touch your heart with His love and open your life to His glory and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**