

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 16th August 2026
The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Collect

O God,
you declare your almighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:
mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Psalms 67

The response to the Psalm is:

**Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.**

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Matthew 15:21-28

[Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.' Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?' He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.' But Peter said to him, 'Explain this parable to us.' Then he said, 'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.']

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

Post Communion

Lord of all mercy,
we your faithful people have celebrated
that one true sacrifice which
takes away our sins and brings pardon and peace:
by our communion
keep us firm on the foundation of the gospel
and preserve us from all sin;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon

My husband has just started a new job in Human Resources, and specifically appointments. As part of his role, he seeks to ensure that all those people on interview panels have undertaken unconscious bias training. This means that they have to engage with a training course which encourages them to recognise that the potential bias with which they see the world.

It's such an important course because we do all have our own biases, or prejudices, and often we are not fully aware of them. The school in which I taught some years ago had a significant Muslim population. One of the Muslim girls in my tutor group was not only highly intelligent, but also extremely ambitious. She had a strong personality, and would often come into my classroom at lunchtime to tell me her latest plans. I can still remember the force with which she would open the door, burst in, and confidently set forth her ideas. And I can also remember that initially I was surprised. Something inside me had somehow assumed that she would be more demure. Thankfully, she enabled me to see my own prejudices, and I admired her strident attitude.

This morning's gospel reading is in part about our prejudices. It is an uncomfortable story, because we cannot really get away from some of the difficult things that Jesus says. And I think that means that we need to pay it even more attention.

You have probably realised by now that in the Ancient Near East, where Jesus lived, there were various political and racial tensions. The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known in the scriptures, and its significance to hearers at the time was that the people of Samaria were not well thought of, making the behaviour of the Samaritan apparently all the more surprising. In this morning's reading, Jesus enters Tyre and Sidon. He is not a stranger to the region – in chapter 11, he compared that region to Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum where inhabitants did not respond positively to Jesus's miracles.

From the start, then, we know that the Canaanite woman is an outsider, viewed as an enemy of Israel. Not only that, she is a woman, and by now we are no doubt fully aware that in the

society of the time, women were treated very differently from men. All of this, then, made the woman's initial approach to Jesus surprising. How could she, both a Canaanite and a woman, have the audacity to approach Jesus? Why didn't she know her place?

I do think at this point it's important to recognise that our own society is not necessarily as different as we might think. We still have social expectations and social taboos. And individually we still have our own blind spots and prejudices. If I say "doctor", for example, do you think of a man or a woman? What about scientist? Or cleaner? Or nurse? And that is before we start to think about other matters, such as ethnicity.

What I love about the gospel reading, is that we are forced to confront our prejudices in the way that the story unfolds. So let's spend just a little bit of time digging into what actually takes place.

The first thing that we are told is that, having entered Tyre and Sidon, Jesus is approached by the Canaanite woman, who is shouting. As we have already said, the fact that a Canaanite woman chose to approach Jesus already breaks boundaries of gender and ethnicity. The fact that she is shouting simply adds to the problem. She is making a spectacle of herself. Listen, though, to what she says. Her words are: 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' We know, then, the reason why she is so desperate to meet with Jesus. Her daughter has a demon and she believes that Jesus can exorcise it. But listen, too, to how she addresses Jesus. First, she asks for mercy, and then she addresses him as Lord, Son of David.

Matthew's gospel was initially written for a Jewish audience. You will remember that much of the first chapter is taken up with a genealogy demonstrating that Jesus is in the line of David, which is crucial if he is to be the Messiah who fulfils the scriptures. This woman, a foreigner and not a Jew, recognises Jesus as Lord, and as a Son of David.

Of course this falls on deaf ears. The disciples want Jesus to send her away. Their complaint is that she keeps shouting at them. Her behaviour, then, is not what would have been expected. It is distasteful and needs to be ignored. What is uncomfortable at this stage is

that Jesus sides with the disciples. He says to the woman: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Effectively he is saying that her daughter's torment has nothing to do with him.

And yet the woman persists. She is not phased by this rebuff. She kneels before Jesus, addresses him once again as Lord, and asks him to help her. From the shouting woman, she has become far more respectable. She is earnest in her belief that Jesus can help her.

Once again, though, Jesus's response is uncomfortable: 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' Yes, in case you wondered, Jesus is deeply insulting this woman, suggesting that she sits beneath the dogs in terms of importance. The woman, though, turns his words around: 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' She believes that even the smallest attention from Jesus can transform her daughter's situation. So she turns his comment around. In response, Jesus applauds her faith and her daughter is healed.

It will not surprise you to know that a lot of ink has been spilled seeking to explain what is going on here. Perhaps the first thing to remember, though, is that although we find Jesus's words shocking – because we are used to him constantly breaking down barriers and boundaries – he is actually saying exactly what would have been expected of the people surrounding him. No one would have expected Jesus, a Jew, to have any time for this Canaanite woman who approaches him in such an indecorous manner.

Was the woman's faith so deep that she actually changed Jesus's mind on this matter? Or was he behaving like this in order to teach the people around him some kind of lesson? I suspect there may always be doubt about this.

And yet the story shows us something exceptionally important – and this was especially relevant to Matthew's Jewish audience. There are, we discover, no barriers to Jesus's saving love and power. He has come to save everyone. In this case that means Jew and gentile alike. In our own society, that means everyone, too. Those who behave as we expect; and those who do not. Those we enjoy spending time with; and those we do not.

This is a story of radical inclusion. And it is also a story of relationship. The woman engages with Jesus. She really believes that he can help her, and she is prepared to persuade him.

We all have our unconscious biases – that is part of our human nature. The challenge from this morning's gospel reading is to seek to be brave enough to recognise them; to relate to those who are different from us; and thereby to move forward. Then we might get a glimpse of the radical inclusion of God's kingdom.

Amen