

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



20 AUGUST 2023

PENTECOST 12



WORSHIP AT HOME

At worship we will be lighting a candle to remember all those who are part of our church community and who are not at worship with us today. You may like to light a candle at home as you follow these worship resources.

Introit- TIS 693 Come as you are. vs 1 (CCLI)

Acknowledgement of First Peoples. By Bible Reader Brenda Grootendoorst

Welcome and Greeting.

Call to worship. From Psalm 133.

L: How good and pleasant it is when those who worship God who desire to live in unity and peace.

R: It is like the pleasure experienced on seeing rainfall transform arid outback plains into carpets of colourful wildflowers.

L: In these and many other ways, God's blessings are truly visible.

R: Here we can come together, people searching for healing and hope:

L: Here, we who are the family of God, are met by the One who would bless us with abundant life.

R: We may find those who are strangers, yet are sisters and brothers of ours.

L: Here we discover the truth that God makes no distinctions among us:

R: Here we are welcomed and embraced by the One whose arms are open to all.'

Hymn TIS 135 All things bright and beautiful vs 1, 2, 3, and choruses (CCLI)

Prayer of Praise and thanksgiving.

L: God of all creation, your beauty and your blessings are visible not only in our wide, sweeping plains, and unique land forms, but also wherever people gather in body and spirit to worship you. We, who gather in this time, come, grateful for all your blessings towards us. We praise you for linking our lives with yours through the gift of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. In and through him, we have been blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring your dreams of a just and peaceful world to reality. A world, where the barriers which separate people from you and from one another, are peacefully and willingly broken down forever. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Pass the Peace

First Word. The Wonky Donkey story. (with Power point of the pictures.)

Prayer of Confession

Forgiving God, we come before you confessing that we are often stubborn and hard-hearted.

There are people we just don't listen to, that we refuse to believe we will hear any truth from, not because of their words necessarily, but because of who it is that's speaking.

Sometimes we resist through prejudice –

because of the colour of their skin, or the make of their clothes,

or because they speak with the accent of an outsider.

It might be that we find their manner annoying, that they don't use the niceties we expect,

or it might be that they keep pushing and pushing their point and become tiresome and irritating. We wish we could brush them away like crumbs off a table. Too often we refuse to see a human face with a human need, any injustice that has been perpetrated, or any wrong that needs to be put right. Forgive us. Renew our minds to listen for truth and justice. Renew our hearts to be open to stranger and friend.
R: Amen.²

Declaration of forgiveness

We rejoice in the good news that God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned. (*John 3:17,18*) .

R: Thanks be to God.

Old Testament reading: Gen 45: 1-15 Brenda Grootendoorst

Joseph Makes Himself Known

⁴⁵ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.^[a]

⁸ “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

¹² “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15: 21-28

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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.”

²³ 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.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Hymn -She came to Jesus -Tune: TIS 626 SLANE - trad. Irish melody (Lord of Creation)

She came to Jesus
from outside the fold -
-Canaanite woman!
Persistent and bold!
Looking to Jesus,
she wanted to see
one who would help her
and set her child free.

Claiming a blessing,
a touch of God's grace,
she knew God's love was
not bounded by place.
Jesus, you listened,
debated then healed -
for in her asking,
her faith was revealed.

God, you still bless those
who seek you in prayer.
-You welcome dreamers
who faithfully dare.
In Christ, now risen,
your mercy extends,
those on the outside
are welcomed as friends.³

Sermon (With powerpoint pictures) Jesus Crosses the Jew-Gentile and purity law boundaries for us all.
The Syro-Phoenician woman. Ormond UCA Aug 20 2023 (**PPT Slide 1**)

I mentioned this passage in my preaching at Ormond a couple of Sundays ago as a turning point in Matthew's gospel. And remember that gospel writer Matthew was writing for predominantly Jewish readers and listeners. This is the story of Jesus' encounter with the Syro- Phoenician woman. **Show sermon ppt slide 2 picture.**

Previously Jesus has been preaching, healing and feeding the 500 + people in Jewish territory on the eastern side of the freshwater Lake Galilee. He had intended and asked his disciples to sail across to Bethsaida, on the eastern Gentile side of Galilee, but they didn't make it because of the storm we heard about last week. And as you may remember, fear overcame them, and even though Peter was brave, after he returned to the boat with Jesus, they all returned to the familiar western Jewish side of the lake.

Next we hear Jesus travels north roughly 50 kms from Galilee out of Jewish territory into the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon. **Show sermon slide 3 -the map.**

And it is in the Gentile area of Tyre that Jesus meets this particular Syro- Phoenician woman. Matthew simplifies and describes her simply as a "Canaanitess" (Mt 15.22), identifying her with Israel's ancient enemies, but Mark 7 describes her as a Greek, a Syrian, and a Phoenician (Mk 7.26)— that is, as a *triple* Gentile! Moreover, she's a woman. She is also known as "St Photini", the name that the Byzantine Orthodox tradition has given to the Syro-Phoenician Greek woman. ⁴

Photini shows a lot of courage confronting Jesus in the way she did. Any woman addressing a Jewish man in those times had to be out of the ordinary, when a woman living in what is now Lebanon, asks a Jewish man for help – and he basically tells her to ‘go away!’

So we’re confronted in these verses not with a ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’, reaching out welcoming loving hands to all who approach him. Rather, the story we heard is sounds quite shocking to our ears; shocking because it portrays Jesus apparently mouthing racial and cultural prejudice!

And when Photini knelt before him and begged for help, Jesus answered that it was not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs – (meaning, those who were not Jewish). In other words, his life-giving healing power was to be used exclusively for the people of Israel – not for those considered outsiders, such as this woman.

As we heard, when the non-Jewish woman approached Jesus begging for help for her daughter, Jesus said: ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’ - the Jewish people.

And really, considering Jewish history, and where Jesus had just been, for his disciples, that would have been the expected answer. The people of Israel guarded their identity and their purity as God’s chosen people with great care, with a myriad of rules and regulations setting out what was clean and what was unclean, all intended to maintain that racial purity. Outsiders were naturally considered to be ‘unclean’ because they did not meet the rules.

In the verses preceding today’s reading, Matthew describes Jesus as being involved in a long and complex argument with the scribes and Pharisees about this very subject – what was clean and unclean according to their ritual laws. As far as they were concerned – the laws governing purity were set down in Leviticus and had to be obeyed.

Back in Galilee Jesus had to deal also with the disciples’ lack of understanding, or perhaps their shock, over his declaration that nothing that passed their lips was unclean – it was what was in their hearts that was more likely to be unclean!

He was probably exhausted and just wanted some peace and quiet and what happens - an outsider, a Gentile – even worse - a woman! - finds her way into the house where he was, and driven by her need, falls on her knees at Jesus’ feet, and begs him to heal her daughter of an unclean spirit. You know the story.

Jesus, hearing the woman’s request, reacts as a traditional Jewish man would, and spurns the pleas of the mother begging on behalf of her tormented little girl, simply because she is a Gentile, not one of the chosen. And then he tells the woman that it was preferable that the food was thrown to the dogs rather than taken out of the mouths of the children of Israel!

At this point, some people say, ‘Well, this shows Jesus was a racist. And he had to learn from a Gentile woman that Gentile women matter!’ “ One example is this thought provoking picture- **Show slide 4** “Jesus understood justice more deeply because she insisted that Syro-Phoenician lives matter.” Yes, Black lives matter. All lives matter.

So – where is the good news in this? Precisely, as someone said that “This is the day that the gospel went to the dogs”.⁵ Because this uppity woman was not prepared to accept Jesus’ words and answered ‘Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’”

Did Jesus suddenly connect what she was saying with what had so recently been on his mind? About what was clean and what was unclean? Did he at this point stop hearing the woman with his ears and hear her with his heart – not physical hearing but a deep hearing of the spirit? Maybe.

But that implies that Jesus was racist, and needed to learn something. Well, yes, Jesus did learn things from a young age when he attended the Temple school. But I think Jesus was always accepting of Gentiles.

I think that it was Matthew himself, rather than Jesus, who really changed his opinion about racism, and Matthew showed it through recounting this story in his gospel as the turning point of his gospel. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience who would struggle with Jesus' willingness to discard both parts of the Jewish law and Jewish traditions, as Mark said. Matthew thought Jesus was not destroying the Jewish Law but fulfilling it. And so he describes Jesus' actions as those not only of justice, but also as mercy. Justice would not heal that woman's daughter. But mercy did. Justice may not include Gentiles in Jesus ministry to the world. But mercy does. So we too are called to use justice and mercy with each other.

Maybe Matthew at first saw this woman as someone not good enough to receive God's mercy simply because he saw her as an outsider - not one of God's chosen people. I wonder if she had similar views about herself that she had to overcome - that - as an outsider - she would have considered herself as not good enough to approach or even speak to Jesus.

There is a powerful and moving story in the *Living the Questions* series of studies about a man who believed himself not good enough to be heard by Jesus. The story is told by an American retreat leader concerning what happened at a retreat for ministers that she was leading.

She had given those attending the retreat an assignment to do over the three days they were together. They had to look through scripture to find a name that belonged to them - to find where the Word uttered their name. (e.g. If their life seemed to be a continual struggle, perhaps the name found for them would be Jacob - suggested by Jacob's wrestling all night with God whilst on his way to meet his brother Esau, or if they were so busy at 'doing' things that they didn't have time to sit at Jesus' feet - perhaps the name they found would be Martha).

On the closing day of the retreat those attending sat around in a circle with an empty chair in the middle. One by one they took turns in the chair and spoke of the names they had found. The last person - came forward, sat down, and said nothing. The drawn out silence became uncomfortable and so the retreat leader asked him if he had a name that he would like to share with them. He replied that he had searched for the three days for a name but none had been strong enough to replace the name that he was given by his father when he was very young. There was a long pause and the leader asked him "What is that name?" He said "**Not good enough** - that's the name my father gave me." And then he started to weep - she said that he wept like he was drowning."

The leader recounted that she and the others sat there feeling unable to break the power of that name. Then, she said, the Spirit did its work - almost like a wind or an impulse, a number of them were moved to get up, go forward and lay hands on the still weeping young man. Several voices, speaking like one voice, said to him "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased - your name is 'Beloved'", then they paused and let the blessing rest and returned to their seats.

When they were all leaving, the leader asked him if what happened had made any difference to him. He said that he didn't really know, but he felt that something that had been broken, was mending. Then he said "Every time I put my hand in the water to help name a human being in front of God, I'll remember who I am - 'Beloved of God' - that's the secret of baptism."

Our Christian identity as baptised people is a gift of grace and says that we, too are beloved of God. We forget and sometimes we rerun old messages from our families, schools, teachers and so on that said we're not good enough.

Show Slide 5 Jesus Crosses the Jew-Gentile and purity law boundaries for us all.

So the day, then, that the 'gospel went to the dogs' was the day it came to us, too. What was excluded is now included - as we are included - as people beloved of him - beloved of God. We do not have to be 'good enough' to be accepted and loved - we are accepted and loved just as we are, no matter what - so let's take some time to celebrate that fact - that your name and my name - is 'Beloved'.⁶

To finish, I invite you to turn to your neighbour or move around to say to one another, 'Your name is Beloved.'
Thanks be to God.

Hymn TIS 665 Jesus Christ is waiting vs 1, 3, 5 . (CCLI)

ANNOUNCEMENTS and Remembering

August 22nd International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief.

August 23rd International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

August 26th Remembering the Tampa Affair and Rescuing of 433 Refugees in 2001

OFFERTORY Introduction

L: God's table is an open table. What we offer today sets the table wide
as the gifts we bring go to places of need and organisations that do good in the world.

Offering PRAYER

Gracious God, take this, ours offering, and let it become food for the hungry, relief for the captive,
healing for the sick and shelter for the refugee.

Amen.⁷

Lighting of the Candle

As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church
community but who are not at worship with us today.

Prayers of the People. By David Northwood on Sunday.

HOME PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

God of hope, love and healing,
you call us to be a community of welcome.

You call us to be servants of others,
to make a difference wherever we are
and to care for your creation.

May we be bird rescuers;
builders of homes for native bees;
restorers of bushland;

rubbish recyclers;
careful users of energy
and guardians of the earth.

Help us to look beyond what we now know,
to not be afraid of wisdom from outsiders.

Let us be overcome by joy at new revelations,
to be curious about innovative justice
and to look for the good that we can do.

Create in us a will to be kind, to offer a supportive arm
or work for all creation to reach its full potential.

Let all your people serve your mission of reconciliation. Amen.⁸

We pray together then as Jesus taught us:

Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Commissioning and Benediction.

Go into this week blessed and refreshed by the grace and mercy of God,
the healing love of Jesus Christ, and the sure and certain presence of the Holy Spirit.

R: Amen

**Recessional hymn- TIS 655 O let the Son of God enfold
you. vs 1. (CCLI)**

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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Presider: Rev Wendy Snook

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES

¹ By Rev Moira Laidlaw, and Rev Wendy Snook from Psalm 133.

² Words for Worship liturgy for Aug 16 2020

³ Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette 2002, *Singing the New Testament*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008

⁴ An interesting detailed Orthodox perspective on the Mark and Matthew readings is at <https://gospelofmarkworkshop.com/did-the-syrophoenician-woman-school-jesus/>

⁵ Rev Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies online

⁶ Story told by Rev Moira Laidlaw -Liturgies online

⁷ Words for Worship liturgy for Aug 16 2020

⁸ Words for Worship liturgy for Aug 16 2020