

## Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

To be able to access the links, go to the bottom of this page and left click on the date. This will download the pdf in a new window, then simply click on the links as indicated.

### Welcome

Today is the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost. As we worship in the privacy of our homes let us remember that we belong to the community of saints around the globe. May we hear God's Word and be renewed and refreshed by his Holy Spirit.

#### Call to Worship: Psalm 67: 3-5 & 7 (GNT)

May the peoples praise you, O God;  
may all the peoples praise you!  
May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
because you judge the peoples with justice  
and guide every nation on earth.  
May the peoples praise you, O God;  
may all the peoples praise you!  
God has blessed us;  
may all people everywhere honour him.

Song: [Our God is a great big God](#) *Click on the link*

### Prayer of Praise.

Living God, we are glad to be part of the great fellowship in heaven and on earth who sing your praises today.

We come with awe and wonder for you are a great God, the creator of the earth and all that exists, everything we can see and everything that cannot be seen.

We come to praise you for you are in control of all things, including everything that concerns us; the King who rules in love and faithfulness, in justice and in truth and who will always do what is right.

We come to praise you for you are the God who has come amongst us and revealed yourself to us in Jesus your Son, enabling us to see in him what you are truly like.

We come to praise you for all that you have done for us in Christ, rejoicing in all that you have given to us, and marvelling at the love with which you surround us.



We come to praise you for walking with us, ever present through good times and bad, guiding our steps and reaching out your hand to catch us when we stumble. We come to praise you for being close to us when the path of life is smooth and when it is or rough. We come to praise you for being with us strengthening us in our weakness, restoring our brokenness, healing our woundedness.

We come to praise you for your ever-present peace and comfort. There is no one like you who loves us as you do.

You alone understand our thoughts, and actions. You alone know our joys and sorrows. You alone feel our pain.

We confess we have not lived as your people, worshipping you as we should, giving gratitude for all that we have and for all you have been to us. We have not looked to you for guidance in our lives, preferring to go our own ways. We have thought too highly of ourselves, and less of our brothers and sisters, failing to show them the love and forgiveness you so freely offer to us. Father, we bring ourselves before you asking for your forgiveness.

We thank you heavenly Father for sending your Son, Jesus into the world, that in obedience to your will he died so that through faith in him our sin is forgiven, and that he is risen and alive, and that he shall return as both Saviour and judge.

Fill us now with your Holy Spirit. May he give us greater understanding of, and insight into, the good news of Jesus, lifting us up and renewing us once more, helping us to live in such a way that our words and our actions might show the world the joy of living as faithful followers of Jesus. So, may all we do and say bring glory to you.

Loving Father, you make today and every day a day of joy and blessing. Praise and honour glory and power be to you.

We pray in the name of your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ;

Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name. Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

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### **A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus**

Healing God, we come to you trusting that you are our refuge and our strength, our help in times of trouble.

We place into your hands people who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and for the family and medical staff who surround them in care.

Keep healthy and safe, healthcare workers and people on the front lines of this disease, and all who perform essential roles to keep our communities going.

We pray for parents, teachers and children going back to school. Help them to keep one another safe and be their peace in time of stress and anxiety.

We pray for our leaders. Guide them with your wisdom, granting them courage to make the bold decisions necessary to minimise the effects of this pandemic, protecting our health services so that those who have had their procedures postponed might have their health needs met.

Bless all who are responding to your call to care for people around the world, particularly those living in places where hygiene regimes and social distancing is difficult.

We pray in name of Jesus. Amen.



### **Bible Passage**

Through Isaiah God promises that salvation will be possible for everyone who turns to him regardless of their ancestral heritage. Remember he is speaking to the nation of Israel. Matthew records a time when Jesus encountered a 'foreigner', someone not a Jew but a Canaanite.

### Isaiah 56:1 & 6-8

The Lord said: Be honest and fair! Soon I will come to save you; my saving power will be seen everywhere on earth.

<sup>6</sup>Foreigners will follow me. They will love me and worship in my name; they will respect the Sabbath and keep our agreement.

<sup>7</sup>I will bring them to my holy mountain, where they will celebrate in my house of worship. Their sacrifices and offerings will always be welcome on my altar. Then my house will be known as a house of worship for all nations.

<sup>8</sup>I, the LORD, promise to bring together my people who were taken away, and let them join the others.

### Matthew 15: 21-28

<sup>21</sup> And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." <sup>24</sup>He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup>And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup>She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

### Jesus meets a Canaanite woman

Today, instead of a narrative sermon I thought it might be more helpful to reflect on these readings using 3 bullet points.

#### The encounter

You may have been surprised by Jesus' attitude towards the woman – he seems very abrupt and curt. Indeed, from what we know about Jesus interpersonal skills through his meeting other people, his comments to the Canaanite woman seem very much out of character.

Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon. These are Gentile cities on the Mediterranean coast some 20 and 30 miles north of the Israel border. They were often the object of condemnation by Old Testament prophets for their Baal worship and materialism.

A local woman, so not a Jew, but a Canaanite, came to seek Jesus' help because her daughter was ill. It's amazing that she does so. She calls Jesus, "Lord, Son of David" probably out of respect and acknowledging Jesus' Jewish heritage, but she likely didn't fully realise what she was saying.

Jesus response to the woman explicitly articulates his mission. He was not simply an itinerant doctor healing sick people; he had a specific calling to the Jews.

God's people, Israel, needed to know that God was now fulfilling his promises. He had sent the long-awaited Messiah. The Kingdom they longed for was beginning to appear.

Dogs get little mention in the Bible, nearly always derogatory, never complementary. 'Dog' was used as a term of abuse by Jews towards Gentiles. However, there are two Greek words for dog and the one Jesus uses here is not the one that was traditionally used as an insult. Matthew, and Mark both record the incident and use the Greek word "*kynáron*" meaning simply "a little dog", puppy, perhaps. If the woman had taken what Jesus said as an insult, her faith would have been damaged and her daughter would not have been healed. Jesus is explaining to her why her request didn't fit into his mission to Israel.

The woman was, nevertheless, persistent. She demonstrated that she understood fully what Jesus was saying and enters into some banter with him. She accepts the terminology but cleverly turns it around, saying that the dogs don't eat the children's food, but they do eat the scraps. If Israel are the people God has chosen to bring the nations to him then ultimately Israel's Messiah will bring blessing on the whole world – "a light to lighten the Gentiles" (Isaiah:41:6)

So, a woman in her distress came to Jesus for help but can offer nothing in return – except her faith. Jesus recognising her 'great faith' (and no doubt her audacity in asking him to heal her daughter) grants the woman's request. Jesus healed the girl with a word. Notice there is no evidence in Matthew's (or indeed, Mark's) account that Jesus ever met her.

### **The actions of the disciples**

As I read the passage, and I've read it many times before, something struck me about the disciples. It was something that happened on the hillside just prior to Jesus feeding the 5,000. They did exactly the same when people brought children to Jesus.

The disciples wanted to turn people away from Jesus, even if they had good intentions in seeking to do so. They were either concerned for Jesus welfare and his need to get some rest or they were concerned for the people and they were when they noticed it was late and people would be hungry when they met them on the hillside.

We can imagine the Canaanite woman shouting at Jesus in the street, creating a scene and causing embarrassment. Remember Jesus and the disciples had left Israel, they were in a foreign land for a little rest and recuperation. Perhaps they feared unwanted attention. So, they want to get rid of her and the embarrassment she is causing.

The disciples were called to be fishers of men and women. It seems that even without casting a net the fish were jumping into the boat and yet the disciples wanted to throw them back into the water. But, let's remember they were still learning.

I wonder how often we inadvertently, or even deliberately, turn people away from Jesus? I wonder how we react to people who either literally or metaphorically shout across the street and cause a scene? I wonder how we respond to people who are not one of us? I wonder if there are some people, like the wee children that were brought to Jesus, we feel are too insignificant for Jesus to be bothered with?

I wonder if the church has set up informal, and probably unintentional barriers, preventing people easily seeking Jesus. For example, most of our buildings look like fortresses. Only in a few of them is it possible to see inside from the outside. I recall a church in rural England deciding what to write on a new noticeboard that had been erected by the church gate. Eventually, after much debate, they had painted in big bold lettering, "Welcome to our Church". What message did that give to those who were not already part of 'our'? Was this a church for them too, or was it an exclusive club only for insiders?

Some of our churches run very successful cafes. These can be great meeting places and as such a benefit to the community. However, are these places where it's easy to meet with Jesus? How easy is it for a customer to discover how they might contact the minister, get pastoral support as they travel through a traumatic period in their lives, or even find out the times of public worship? Are Bibles available for people to read as they sip their tea? Is there an encouraging or uplifting quote from Jesus easily seen so it can be read as they pass through? Or, do we prevent them seeing Jesus because we are more concerned with their café experience and the quality of a fine piece?

Like the disciples we too are learners in the craft of mission and ministry and, of course, we won't always get it right for everyone.

**Song:** [O Lord all the world belongs to you](#) *Click on the link*

### **The messages of the encounter**

There are three essential messages;

- (1) a message about how we live alongside one another regardless of racial, genetic, or cultural differences.
- (2) the importance of faith.
- (3) that when we turn to Jesus in faith he answers our prayers.

It's clear from what Jesus said to the woman that he came primarily to the Jews. God had chosen Israel as the nation through which the new life he offers would come to the world. It's why Jesus came first to the Jews. They needed to understand that in Jesus the

promised Messiah had come. The one for whom they had waited so long was now walking among them.

This encounter makes clear what was hinted at right at Jesus' birth with the arrival of the magi representing not only the wealthy but Gentiles. Jesus' message of love, forgiveness and salvation was for everyone Jew and Gentile.

The Law had sought to ensure that foreigners were treated with dignity and respect:

**Leviticus 19:33-34** "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."

The passage we read today from Isaiah makes clear God's intention to embrace people of every nation. Paul emphasised this, stating that in God's Kingdom there is no such thing a Jew or Gentile, "for all are one in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

That's certainly a message for us today. All people are made in the image of God. God loves each person regardless of their genetic or cultural background. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus the gate of heaven is open that all may go in.

Jesus' mission was to the Jews, only when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples would it be tenaciously taken beyond Judea and Israel. Jesus final words, as recorded by Matthew, are about making disciples of all nations. Luke, in the Book of Acts records Jesus pre-ascension directive to the disciples as; "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Jesus' Great Commission is for the Good News to be taken from Jerusalem and out to Gentile nations.

However, early Jewish Christians, possibly even the disciples, and certainly the early Church were reluctant to accept that Gentiles were legitimately part of God's new covenant community. Even today we hold-on tightly to our traditions and our attitudes can quickly become deeply ingrained.

We only need to read the Book of Acts or some of Paul's letters to understand that the place of Gentiles within the early Church was hard fought, but eventually won, none the least because of Paul. It's interesting to read how the Gentile 'puppies' gobbled up the Gospel more enthusiastically than the Jewish 'children'.

In this encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we see the future breaking into the present. First Jesus had to go to Jerusalem, face crucifixion, experience resurrection and then send his followers out to the whole world. The disciples, and possibly even Jesus, were not yet ready for that - but this woman couldn't wait.

Matthew describes her as a Canaanite. Canaanites were the traditional enemies of the Jews. Jesus freely shows her love and compassion. Jesus seeks nothing from her he simply accepts the great faith she has.

Faith is the central point of the encounter Jesus has with the woman. She demonstrates this both by what she says and by her coming to Jesus for the healing of her daughter.

Like the centurion of chapter 8, she exhibits a faith greater than that of the Pharisees and most Israelites. Indeed, the Gospels record Jesus saying “great is your faith” to no-one else, just this woman. When Jesus was in back in Nazareth Matthew tells us that Jesus was unable to perform any miracles there “because of their lack of faith.” (Matthew 13:56) Salvation is by faith as Paul makes clear in his letter to the Romans, contrasting the faith of the new Gentile believers and that of the Jews;

“the Gentiles, who were not trying to put themselves right with God, were put right with him through faith; while God's people, who were seeking a law that would put them right with God, did not find it. And why not? Because they did not depend on faith but on what they did.” (Romans 9:30-32)

The woman's great faithfulness makes her part of the new covenant community, the new Israel. God's blessing is on her and her daughter. Healing and wholeness are given freely by Jesus. The woman's anxiety, concern and worry for her daughter dissolves as a result of her faithful encounter with Jesus.

That peace can be ours today.

**Song:** [Be still and know that I am God](#) *Click on the link*

Verses 1 & 4 are based on Psalm 46: 10.

Verse 2 is based on Jeremiah 30:17.

Verse 3, we can find these words many times in the Psalms.

### **Prayers of the People for the People**

God and Father of all, in your love you made all the nations of the world to be a family, and your Son taught us to love one another.  
Yet our world is riven apart with prejudice, arrogance, and pride.  
You call us to live in community and teach us to care for one another following the pattern of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.



Guide all whose position and authority affect the lives of others.  
Inspire them with a vision of the community as it might be,  
where love of neighbour and concern for one another drive out discontent and strife, anxiety and fear. Help us all to work together with one heart and desire to serve the common good, and to minister to people in trouble and despair.

Help the different races to love and understand one another better. Increase among us empathy, tolerance, and goodwill, that we may learn to appreciate the gifts that other cultures and traditions bring to us, and that we enjoy, in music and dance, in art, in food and in many other ways.

Save us from jealousy, hatred, and fear, and help us to live together as members of one family at home in the world, sons and daughters of one Father.

In particular we thank you that the Gospel of Jesus spread out from Israel into all the world. Help us to seize every opportunity to witness to his working in our lives.

We bring to you the needs of all whose hearts are troubled;  
people weighed down by physical or mental ill health,  
all weighed down by worry or fear,  
and those weighed down by sadness.

We bring to you the needs of all who each day go hungry, cold, without a place to call home. Be the voice they hear and bring healing, wholeness, comfort, strength and peace, and wrap them in your love.

Heavenly Father, we bring to you the needs of those caught up in the derailment near Stonehaven this week. For people hurt and injured we ask for healing; for the those bereaved, comfort and strength; for those who attended the derailment your protection from trauma; for those who will investigate we ask you grant them insight, knowledge, integrity and honesty.

Be with all who mourn. We thank you for the give of eternal life through faith in Jesus. We thank you this is your promise to all people. So, we ask that tear will be wiped away knowing that you keep your promises.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. Amen.

### **Benediction and Blessing**

May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.  
The Lord be with you all.

(2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Song: [Blessing](#) [Click on the link](#)

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One of the consequences of us not being able to worship together is that the church anticipates a fall in income. However, we will continue to incur costs, of insurance etc. There will be little financial saving to our not meeting, yet revenues could be severely hit. Please prayerfully reflect on this and, if you are able, continue to put aside your financial offering so that you can make your contribution for the work of the church when we next meet together. Thank you.

Thank you too if you already give by standing order or by bank transfer, that is much appreciated.