

# 16<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

## Call to Worship - Psalm 105:1-2

Give thanks to the Lord, invoke him by name; make known his deeds among the peoples.  
Pay him honour with song and psalm and tell of all his marvellous deeds.

## Prayers of Adoration

Lord our God, we praise you because of your love that reaches out towards us. You welcome us into your presence, and this not because of anything that we have done or deserve but because of your loving nature. We are the work of your hands. You made us and cherish us. You loved us so much that even before we paid you any attention you sent your Son to be our Lord and Saviour and Friend. Your grace shines out through the story of the Scriptures. You made all things through your power, and made people to have a relationship with you and each other. You send your Holy Spirit upon your church that we may learn of you and be guided in our everyday lives. Although life is not easy, we are held by your everlasting arms and kept safe for eternity. Lord our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship and adore you. We open our hearts to receive your Word today. **Amen.**

## Prayer of Confession

Lord, you have made each person in your image and invited all to come to you for life. Your arms are open to receive everyone who comes to you for rest and healing. Forgive us for the false limits that we place upon your grace. Forgive us for our narrowness of mind and our willingness to embrace only those people that we deem to be like us. You call us to love one another as you have loved us. Forgive us when our lives consist mainly of our own desires and wants, and we fail to reach out to others around us. You grant us your wisdom and strength and all the resources of Heaven to help us to live as you want us to. Forgive us when we try to do things in our own strength and fail to receive the help that you give. As we confess our sins and shortcomings we hear your words of grace. Our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. **Amen**

## StF 690 – The Church's One Foundation

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| 1) The church's one foundation<br>Is Jesus Christ her Lord;<br>She is his new creation<br>By water and the word;<br>From heaven he came and sought her<br>To be his holy bride;<br>With his own blood he bought her,<br>And for her life he died.       | 3) In toil and tribulation,<br>And tumult of her war,<br>She waits the consummation<br>Of peace for evermore;<br>Till with the vision glorious<br>Her longing eyes are blest,<br>At last the Church victorious<br>Shall be the Church at rest.           |
| 2) Called out from every nation,<br>Yet one through all the earth,<br>Her charter of salvation<br>One Lord, one faith, one birth;<br>One holy name she blesses,<br>And shares one holy food,<br>And to one hope she presses<br>With every grace endued. | 4) Yet she on earth has union<br>With God the Three in One,<br>And mystic sweet communion<br>With those whose rest is won.<br>O happy ones and holy!<br>Lord, give us grace that we,<br>With them, the meek and lowly,<br>In heaven your face shall see. |

## **Reading: Isaiah 51:1-6 - Everlasting salvation for Zion**

‘Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many. The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. ‘Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last for ever, my righteousness will never fail.

## **Reading: Matthew 15:21-28 - The faith of a Canaanite woman**

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**

Jesus travelled to a certain region and a Canaanite woman came seeking help for her daughter. She was a Gentile, not part of the Jewish people. It’s a difficult passage at first sight because, looking superficially at it we may think that Jesus was reluctant to grant the woman his attention. His words may even sound like a rejection to begin with. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” However, we need to look more deeply.

There were wild dogs living in the Mediterranean region, which could be fierce and dangerous. However, the Greek word used in this passage for dogs does not refer to these, but can literally be translated “little dogs”. The Complete Jewish Bible translates this as “pet dogs”. These were not the wild dogs to be avoided, they were part of a household and therefore entitled to food and provisions. I like to think of Jesus having a twinkle in his eye as he said this, that actually far from rejecting the woman’s request he actually looked with love and compassion and humour.

So what’s going on here? Jesus may have delayed the answer to her request in order to draw out faith and understanding. Sometimes our prayers are not answered straight away, or in the way that we would have liked. When God allows this to happen, it may be because there is some treasure for us to pick up on the journey, which we would have missed if we had reached our destination immediately. Maybe there is some way in which we or our prayers change for the better over time, which would not have happened if our request had been granted without delay. Have you experienced this? Over time, you are praying for a particular situation, which seems not to be changing as you would like, but you keep on praying. You find that over time your prayers become deeper and more mature and more full of understanding. When we pray like this our situation maybe does not change, but we do! Gradually our prayers grow from a simple request for a difficulty-free life to a prayer for God to make us stronger and able to meet the situation with his resources. It leads us to a deeper communion with our Lord and a greater spiritual maturity and understanding. Sometimes only after this do we find that our circumstances improve too. Back to our reading today: Jesus, through his delay and questioning, draws out the strong faith, spiritual depth and

humility of this Canaanite woman. Jesus then proclaims that her request is granted! Her daughter is made well. In the delay, the disciples (and we) learn important lessons about faith, patience, persistence and humility as well as the mission of Jesus.

There is another context to consider as well, and that is the broad sweep of God's plans in history and the future.

Last year one of my astronomical society friends who also has a liking for rocks gave me a geological heritage trail leaflet about Dudley. It wasn't at all what I expected. I thought I would find descriptions of various natural outcrops of rock in the area, and that the Wren's Nest reserve would feature strongly. It was something else entirely! It was actually about public structures in the town centre such as civic buildings, shops, banks, cobblestones etc., and what they were made from, roofed or clad with. It described various structures and gave details of types of rock, where in the world they came from, and how many millions of years ago those rocks formed. Shop fronts that I would have walked past without any thought now took on a different meaning as I learned that materials that I might have imagined being made in a factory actually were natural. I learned where they were quarried from, how old they were and the natural processes by which they were formed. As I considered this leaflet with interest, a Bible verse came to mind, which is actually part of our Isaiah reading today: Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. The passage then goes on to speak of Abraham and Sarah as father and mother of God's people, from whom the Lord's rulership and deliverance would go forth to coasts and islands and beyond, even to the very heavens.

If we want to understand who we are and where we are going then we also need to understand where we came from. Our faith, our church, this wonderful worldwide community of which we are part didn't arise in a vacuum. It wasn't an afterthought on God's part. It always was God's plan!

Here's the key point: God had a plan of rescue for the world, and right from the beginning this included all people on earth. In fact, many scriptures point to this blessing being not just for people but all creatures and every created thing, the entire fabric of the universe. Surely this is good news for the present generation living in a world that seems to be straining under the weight of human activity. God's rescue plan is worldwide, universal.. but there's a proper sequence.

God looked for a person through whom he could work, and tested Abraham by asking him to leave his home and relatives and go to a land that he would show him, in order that he would be blessed, be the father of a great nation and be a blessing to all people on earth. We can read about these promises in the book of Genesis from chapter 12 onwards. Abraham believed and obeyed and became the father of the nation of Israel and the Jewish people to whom God gave the Law and Prophets, and through whom eventually came Jesus, the Messiah, who is the Saviour of all. Here's the thing: God started with one man, then a nation, then all people, then the ultimate future fulfilment incorporates the whole cosmos. God called the Jewish people to be a source of blessing to all the world, and that calling has never been revoked. God's treasures were never intended to be limited to one nation, but given to all people. We as modern day Christian believers do not replace God's original people, but are joined to them, as the spiritual descendants of Abraham. To make this really personal: God's plan of blessing included us from the start. It included YOU. From the beginning of time God saw you in advance and loved you. He knew when and where you would be born, where you would live and understands where you are now and what is going on in your life. His plan of blessing always encompassed you. We are included, through Christ, in God's people, and given a part in his universal salvation plan.

When Jesus spoke to the Canaanite woman he already fully understood the Divine plan of inclusion for all. If there was any hesitation about whether at this time he should help a non-Jewish person it was a matter not of inclusion but of sequence. There was a proper order to things. He knew that he would be the Saviour of all nations but that it would begin with his ministry to the Jews of Israel. Later, the risen Jesus

was to commission his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem but to go from there to Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Through the story of this wonderful, eloquent, intelligent, witty Canaanite lady we can learn many lessons, including: trust, persistence in prayer, humility and the importance of not being offended or giving up when God doesn't do straight away what we think he should. She persisted in trust and received what she asked for. In the wider picture we learn humility and gratitude and reverence concerning the Jewish roots of our faith and God's plan of inclusion for all. We remember that God knew and loved us from the very beginning, incorporated us into his eternal family and made us part of his universal restoration plan.

Thanks be to God. Amen

## StF 655 – We cannot measure how you heal

- 1) We cannot measure how you heal  
Or answer every sufferer's prayer,  
Yet we believe your grace responds  
Where faith and doubt unite to care.  
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
Survive to hold and heal and warn,  
To carry all through death to life  
And cradle children yet unborn.
- 2) The pain that will not go away,  
The guilt that clings from things long past,  
The fear of what the future holds,  
Are present as if meant to last.  
But present too is love which tends  
The hurt we never hoped to find,  
The private agonies inside,  
The memories that haunt the mind.
- 3) So some have come who need your help  
And some have come to make amends  
As hands which shaped and saved the world  
Are present in the touch of friends.  
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here  
To mend the body, mind, and soul,  
To disentangle peace from pain  
And make your broken people whole.

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## Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father God, we give you thanks that Jesus is our salvation, bringing healing and belonging. He is the source of restoration for all people and all living creatures, and everything that is made. Through him we are part of your family, and we will be in your presence for evermore. **Amen.**

## Prayers of Intercession

Blessed are you, Lord, to be magnified and glorified forever. We pray for your holy and universal church and for this congregation, for all who worship, for all who are joined to us in spirit, for all who serve up front or behind the scenes as staff or volunteers, for our ministers and leaders, for Rev Helen as she prepares to begin ministry in this circuit, for our brothers and sisters in churches that belong to other denominations but who with us serve the one Saviour.

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

Give wisdom to those who govern the nations of the world. May they have courage and integrity to be good shepherds of the people under their care, and creative in finding solutions to the problems they face.

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

Open our eyes to the needs of our church community and neighbourhood, especially of people going through times of trial and difficulty. Help those who are ill or infirm, and those caring for them. Draw close to all who call on you for help, giving special grace to those who feel that answers to their prayers are

not forthcoming, and those who struggle to make sense of life and circumstances. Comfort those who are bereaved. We commend to you all who have died, giving thanks especially for those whose lives have drawn us nearer to you.

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: *Hear our prayer***

We recognise our part in your plan of salvation for all the universe. We are part of your blessed community and as such are called to share our blessings with others. Give us grace to recognise and take opportunities to bring practical help and spiritual comfort, peace, joy and healing to those around us, therefore sharing your treasures as you have called us.

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: *Hear our prayer***

Lord our God, as we bring you our requests with faith and thanksgiving, our prayers ascend to you and we know that you hear and answer according to your grace and riches in glory.

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **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 this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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 for ever. **Amen.**

## StF 416 – There's a wideness in God's mercy

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| 1) There's a wideness in God's mercy<br>Like the wideness of the sea;<br>There's a kindness in his justice<br>Which is more than liberty.      | 4) For the love of God is broader<br>Than the measures of the mind;<br>And the heart of the Eternal<br>Is most wonderfully kind.           |
| 2) There is plentiful redemption<br>In the blood that has been shed;<br>There is joy for all the members<br>In the sorrows of the Head.        | 5) But we make his love too narrow<br>By false limits of our own;<br>And we magnify his strictness<br>With a zeal he will not own.         |
| 3) There is grace enough for thousands<br>Of new worlds as great as this;<br>There is room for fresh creations<br>In that upper home of bliss. | 6) If our love were but more simple<br>We should take him at his word;<br>And our lives would be illumined<br>By the presence of our Lord. |

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## Closing Prayer/Blessing

May God grant us understanding of his will, knowledge of his love, and grace to share his treasures. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among us and remain with us now and for ever.

**Amen**