

Sunday 16th August 2020

Claire Musselwhite and Michelle Cottis - Listen and Understand

Psalm 95 v 1-7a

¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. ³ For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Opening prayer

Lord God, as we worship you today help us to fix our eyes totally on You. As we come before You, we open our hearts to You. Speak to us Lord and may we Your people, hear Your Voice and be willing to act upon it. Amen

First Reading – Romans 11: 1-2a, 29-32

The Remnant of Israel

¹¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now^[a] receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Second 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.

Talk – Michelle Cottis

Here we are seeing Jesus is in the midst of his mission. Thousands were flocking to hear him speak, so they could learn about the kingdom of heaven. He has fed 5,000 with just five loaves of bread and two fish. And the sick were being brought to him to be healed. After seeing Jesus walk on water, the disciples were finally starting to realise that he really was the Son of God. Jesus's reputation was starting to precede him. Pharisees and teachers were getting ruffled; questioning him on his knowledge of the law and trying to trip him up.

Even those outside of the Jewish faith were hearing about the messiah. Today we are told of a Canaanite woman, a Gentile, a non-Jew, who cries out to Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter.

Jesus initially ignores her, and then tells the disciples that he has only been sent "to the lost sheep of Israel", meaning the Jewish people. This can seem a bit difficult for us to comprehend, particularly when today we understand God's inclusive love for everyone.

But it is important to remember that at this point in Jesus's mission, he is focused on getting his message to the Jews. God has spoken to Jesus clearly about his path, and it isn't until after Jesus's death and resurrection that he gives his disciples the Great Commission: to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Jews and Gentiles alike.

Let's first focus on the Canaanite woman, and her reaction to Jesus. Unlike the disciples, who despite spending so much time with Jesus, are still grasping exactly who Jesus is, the woman recognises Jesus as "Lord, Son of David". She immediately acknowledges that he is the prophesied Messiah. She has understood how she is unworthy, and how demons submit to his authority.

She cries for mercy and she asks for help. She is persistent in her request. So much so that the disciples seem to get quite annoyed with her. Knowing that she is not a Jew, she pleads that she would even be willing to take the discarded left-overs from the house of Israel; to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. A term that now forms a familiar part of our communion service today.

As some of you may know, we have a Labrador called Luna. She is highly motivated by food. She has built up an unusual relationship with the birds in our garden. We place our stale bread crusts on a little bird swing. Luna sits at the back door and waits patiently for the sparrows to start feeding. Generally the pieces of bread are too big for them, so they take a piece, move it onto the ground. Take what they want and leave the rest for Luna who happily consumes the left overs. There is enough for everyone, no matter your background. Nothing goes to waste!

And so we see that Jesus does listen to the Canaanite woman, and her plea to be included at the Lord's table. He does not turn her away. He sees her faith. He rewards her. And at that moment her daughter is healed.

It's important for us to remember just how determined this lady was. She has broken through many religious divides to come to Jesus. She is also a woman approaching Jesus and the other male disciples on her own. She is taking some big risks here, on many levels.

When we come to Jesus, are we willing to take the risks that the Canaanite woman did? Are we quick to ask for mercy and recognise that Jesus is our Lord and saviour? Are we willing to be as persistent as she was? Are we able to be really annoying in prayer, and not stop until our prayers have been answered?

Or do we fire off a quick arrow prayer, without taking the time to bring ourselves fully to Jesus's feet. Do we just have a tick-list that we work our way through? Our relationship with God is not a

one-way conversation, so are we taking the time to listen to God? To respond to Him, in the way that the Canaanite listened to Jesus and responded confidently to his questions.

I wonder how much more effective our prayers would be if we were as determined and faithful as the Canaanite woman.

Secondly, let's take a look at how the disciples reacted to the Canaanite woman. We read that they urged Jesus to send her away. They are getting frustrated that she is crying out after them.

Do you think they were really listening to the woman? Or did they just see an outsider that was inconvenience, interrupting their time and their plans with Jesus?

I wonder if you could take a moment to think about a time when you were having some fellowship with your friends. Perhaps before the lockdown, during coffee after the Sunday service. And then you get interrupted. Someone butts in. Someone who isn't part of your usual group. Maybe it's someone that you've never met before. Maybe it's someone who is quite different from you. They distract you from your status quo.

How do you feel? A bit annoyed? Is it a bit of an effort to engage with them? Do you try and get them out of your way as quickly as possible, so you can go back to the way things were?

Following the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests, I felt prompted to read a book that has been at the top of the best sellers list for a few months and won numerous awards: *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge, a black British female journalist. Which I quickly followed with *We need to talk about race - Understanding the black experience in white majority churches* by Ben Lindsay, a black pastor at a white majority church in London. They are both very insightful and I'd recommend them both to you.

My eyes have been opened to the existence of 'white privilege' and the constant challenges and barriers that black and ethnic minorities face everyday living in the UK and within our white majority churches. In short white privilege is the inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race. Through no fault of my own, being born a white person in a white majority country has afforded me a vast array of advantages that I take for granted and don't even realise that I am benefiting from. If you'd like to understand more, a short video will be posted on the talk webpage, helps to show what this is.

The point I'm trying to make here, is how many people, who do not fit into our comfortable bubble because of their race, class or disability, find that there are barriers to entering and connecting with our church. How many of us unwittingly send people away. How many of us don't like the idea of being put outside of our comfort zones.

We know that our God is loving and inclusive. He is also a God of justice and equality. When his heart breaks for injustice, ours should break too. As white people we shouldn't just sit in agreement with movements like Black Lives Matter. Click 'like' or 're-tweet' on a social media post. That's not enough. We need to be having more conversations about these topics. We need to listen and we need to understand.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're sorry when we fall short. As Paul reminds us in our reading today from Romans 11, we recognise that we have received your mercy following our disobedience. We thank you for loving us regardless of our race, class or abilities. You made us unique, help us to love one another and celebrate our differences. To be patient and kind, and to stand up for those who face injustice.

Amen.

Intercessory prayers - Sue Johnson

Dear Father God,

We praise you and give you glory, you are the living God who loves us. Thank you that we can come before you, knowing that you hear our prayers, and please may we trust that you will answer our prayers as you see fit. May we take the example of the Canaanite woman and be patient, expectant and persistent. Please give us the wisdom to listen to you, hear and understand your voice, and act on it. LORD, in your mercy hear our prayer.

You have given us a marvellous world, and we are sorry that we don't always look after it like we should. We pray for the world and all the people in it who are going through a bad time, grieving, suffering, feeling anxious and depressed. Please give them your peace and comfort. The world continues to be in the midst of the pandemic, so please give wisdom to people who should be avoiding close contact, or not wearing masks when they should. Please bless and give energy and good health to all those health workers who are doing their best to cope with the pandemic. During a few moment's silence may we bring before you the names of those on our hearts. LORD, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Now that the UK has entered a serious recession, we need your help more than ever Lord. Please help our leaders who are trying to guide us. For people who are now unemployed or are likely to be made redundant soon, or whose businesses are in danger of failing, may they find work and may their businesses be rescued. And young people particularly are going through a difficult time. Please can their exam results be worked out satisfactorily, may they get the university or college places that are right for them, and may those looking for their first job find something suitable. For the migrants crossing the Channel seeking asylum, please may permanent solutions be found so that there are not so many desperate people fleeing their countries in the first place, and if they do end up on British soil may they be treated with compassion. LORD, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Please bless our places of worship and give wisdom to our leaders as they navigate their way through these challenging times. We ask for your blessing particularly on Mandy, Maria, Allison, Gary, Stuart, and all those who are helping COS to serve you. We continue to pray for a new Bishop of Chelmsford and a new Minister here at COS, and we continue to trust you that the right people will be found, and in your time. LORD, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Finally, we end with some words from Margaret Rizza. "Calm me Lord, as you stilled the storm. Still me Lord, keep me from harm. Let all the tumult within me cease. Enfold me Lord, in your peace".

And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

A sending out prayer

We go out today, renewed and strengthened in faith, ready to serve you, Lord, and find you in the people we meet. We go out to follow you, and our hearts. Lead us, good Lord. Amen.

Notices

Church of Our Saviour **continues to be open for Private Prayer** Monday to Saturday from 11am to midday. Please come along and sit in the stillness of our worship space.

A Short Mid week Holy Communion is taking place on Tuesday at 11.30 (18th). Please let Mandy know by Monday if you would like to attend, as there are limited places in church. Great care is being taken to keep everyone safe and if you would like to come along but are unsure for any reason, then please give Mandy a call and she will happily talk it through with you. Her phone number is 01245 287710