

Worship Outline including a Reflection for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Opening Verse of Scripture Psalm 67.1

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

Collect: Prayer for the Day

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, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First Reading: 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.

Second Reading: 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. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 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.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15.21-28

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.

Reflection

'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'

Earlier in Matthew's gospel Jesus directs the disciples to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and urges them to steer clear of the Gentiles and Samaritans (Matt 10 v 5 - 6). So it could seem a little strange that now Jesus himself heads in a pagan direction, toward Tyre and Sidon. Indeed, Jezebel, who sought to destroy Elijah, was the daughter of one of the Kings of Tyre, indicating the type of person who was seen as coming from that region! Perhaps not surprisingly whilst He's there Jesus is met by a pagan, a (Canaanite) woman.

When His disciples ask Jesus to send her away it would appear that He doesn't, but repeats to them that He has come to the "lost sheep of Israel", those who are professing a faith in the God who is His Father. The Canaanite woman continues to question Him and her faith is rewarded with the healing of her daughter. In not dismissing the Canaanite woman we get an insight into both into Jesus' sense of urgency in helping the Jews to understand the New Covenant which He reveals, and equally His openness not to reject anyone who comes to Him in faith.

But why did Jesus go to this pagan region in the first place? We cannot know for certain but perhaps it was to live out His mission to seek out the lost sheep wherever they may have wandered. After this interchange Jesus moves on again, back down to the Sea of Galilee and the up into the hills above it so we don't know if the interaction with the Canaanite woman was all that happened there or whether He met with others who lives were similarly transformed.

The interchange with the Canaanite woman takes place in the middle of a number of exchanges between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes where the Pharisees and scribes are questioning the authority of Jesus and Jesus is questioning their understanding of the Law, and by extension, of God. The point of keeping purity laws, the Pharisees would maintain, was that so the person could be the type of individual that God had intended. Jesus responds in today's gospel passage by emphasising that the type of person God wants is one who is pure, not just on the surface, but deep down too, as exemplified by

the words that come out of their mouth. Just to stick to the laws of outward purity misses the point.

The discourse with the Canaanite woman underlines this point by taking these exchanges out of the context of a purely Jewish debate and placing them in the context of the broader world of Jews and Gentiles. It shows that Jesus' calling and mission has a far broader scope, it is to the whole world. Through His sacrifice on the cross Jesus offers real purity, inward and outward, to Jews and Gentiles alike.

The gospel reading presents us with a number of challenges to our lives. It challenges us not to miss the point by keeping our faith too small or too exclusive but openly offering it to all who ask. It challenges us in that whilst we may not follow the purity codes of the Jews, we need to constantly reflect on our words thoughts and intentions to see whether they are telling us that our own purity, which will be made complete when we met Christ, needs to be worked on until we do. It also challenges us about where we decide to spend our time, sticking with those who are like ourselves or stepping out into unfamiliar territory where we may meet lost sheep who are looking for crumbs that we, through our faith in the One who is the bread of life, may be able to offer them. Are we brave enough to walk on the wild side and do that? Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

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. Amen.