



(image: Presbyterian Church NJ)

We take a breath and come intentionally into God's presence

The Lord be with you: **And also with you.**

Holy Spirit draw us close and minister your grace to us, open our hearts and minds to all you have to say and show us this day. **Amen.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Bible 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**

This passage makes for uncomfortable reading, did Jesus really just negate this woman and her daughter with poor mental health?

So is this his humanness, the inherited biases of his upbringing coming through? Or is there something else going on?

Jesus has been teaching his disciples about hypocrisy, about the difference between following rigid human rules and the heart of God. He has been speaking out about those who follow God with their lips but yet practice favouritism, exclusion and contempt for fellow human beings.

Then this woman appears. We are used to women approaching and touching Jesus, but according to the rules of the time they really shouldn't have. We know Jesus talks openly to women in public (the woman at the well, the woman accused of adultery) which according to the rules he really shouldn't have done. This woman who approaches today is a non-Jewish woman, a Canaanite. Canaanites were purportedly considered idol worshipping enemies with their polytheistic faith. This woman is the wrong gender, the wrong ethnicity, the wrong heritage and the wrong religion. And yet here she comes, calling out to Jesus.

He should really ignore her, he's supposed to exclude her. She is after all 'lesser' than him and not worth his time in listening to her story.

Of course we know differently, we know that this is not how Jesus sees things, we know that this is not how God sees things. Theologians Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty point out that "Jesus came to earth not primarily as a male but as a person. He treated women not primarily as females but as human beings."

So might Jesus' racist and misogynist response been intended to shock the disciples? The disciples who were so often slow to understand, who would nod sagely as Jesus spoke words of grace and mercy, but react quickly to reject and eject the very people Jesus was talking about? Was Jesus then holding a mirror up to their prejudices to show them what they were really thinking, to jolt them into deeper understanding?

And we of course expect, want Jesus to welcome the Canaanite woman and heal her daughter, for that is the right and righteous thing to do isn't it? We would do it.

Or would we? What has been our response to the plight of refugees crossing the channel? Did we say 'All lives matter' in reaction to BLM negating their stories of ongoing discrimination and injustice? But are these refugees not the 'All Lives' that statement was purporting to include?

Does this cry not matter if you are the wrong colour, the wrong ethnicity, or on our border? Is it OK then to drown at sea? Are they dogs not worthy of the crumbs from our comfortable table?

Do we want Jesus to welcome and help this Canaanite woman and her child but decry the parents and children fleeing in boats? Is mercy somehow limited only to those we know, those who are 'like us', those who somehow 'deserve' our notice?

Of course our call as Christians, as fellow humans journeying this world together, is to love, to love with our whole hearts, to love without barriers, without judgements, without exclusions.

Are we willing then for Jesus to hold a mirror up to our prejudices, our unconscious biases and responses?

Isn't campaigning for expanding safe and legal routes for people in search of safety worthy of our calling and compassion? It trended this week that Lebanon (which we

hold in our prayers) whilst only the size of Devon and Cornwall shelters 1.5 million refugees compared to 150,000 here in the UK.

Sometimes we do need a mirror held up to ourselves, to check our responses and to ask ourselves: Am I vilifying a group of people rather than seeing them as having equal value to me and my family in the eyes of God? Am I being compassionate as I too would want compassion shown to me and my family? Am I loving with great humanity and humility knowing all life is sacred and hallowed by God?

And then knowing that when we welcome the 'other' the ones deemed 'lesser' we welcome God. And we will also be healed.

Amen.

### **Worship Music**

When I needed a neighbour were you there? - Sidney Bertram and Daniel Shields: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7a7LdgRh-k>

Be thou my vision - Evolsiay Tulip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT\\_Hjg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg)

To God be the Glory - Royal Albert Hall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU&t=111s>

Oh Lord hear my prayer - Lucy Gibson (attached)

### **Prayers of Intercession** (the first prayer is adapted from the Church of England prayer resources)

Almighty and merciful God,  
whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own;  
look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from scarcity and danger.  
Protect those who are vulnerable, those who are trafficked.  
Guide just and compassionate immigration policies and systems.  
Bless those who work to bring aid and relief;  
inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts;  
and guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your kingdom of justice and of peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

May government policies and social care systems adequately support all those in need and the most vulnerable in society. **Amen.**

As we commemorate VJ day we remember those who gave so much and commit ourselves to and pray for peace.  
We pray for good, wise and compassionate workings of governments and rulers within and between countries. We pray for those who suffer the trauma of war and unrest, and all who serve. **Amen.**

We pray for the people of Belarus and for Lebanon as they seek to move forward. **Amen.**

We pray for our young people and those who counsel them, for those who did and those who did not get the grades they hoped for; for a fair appeals system. Give hope to the unemployed, the uncertain and those who are anxious for the future. **Amen.**

We pray for those who live with pain, and changes in circumstances, those waiting for operations and those whose recovery is slow. All affected by Covid. **Amen.**

Surround all who struggle in body, mind and spirit with your healing love and knowledge of your presence. Bless those who care for them. **Amen.**

We lift before you the needs of our families, friends, neighbours, communities and ourselves .... **Amen.**

We commend to your safe and eternal keeping those who have recently died, and ask your comfort for those who grieve.

We remember before you those whom we have loved and look to see again in your eternal kingdom .... **Amen.**

*In this moment of stillness we lift before God the prayers of our own hearts this day  
.....*

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our 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 them that 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.**

### **Blessing**

God give you grace to follow his saints  
in faith and hope and love;  
and the blessing of God almighty the  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you and those whom you love always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in  
the morning, We will remember them.*