



Worship at Home Service
16th August 2026 Elizabeth Rodgers
Launceston Area Methodist Circuit

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. We pray that it helps you spend some time with God, knowing that other people are sharing in worship too.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today, as we come to the Lord and recall all that he has done for us, let's remember that we are being joined by countless others all over the world and through the ages.

"Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!"

HYMN - Let all the world in every corner sing (HAP 10, STF57)

OPENING PRAYER

"But above all the heart must bear the longest part".

Father God, with our minds we know that you are worthy of all praise and honour, but in our hearts we do not always feel that wonder. Our senses are dulled, whether by the ups and downs of everyday life or by over-familiarity with ideas and words which we've heard or said so many times before. Now we pray that your Spirit will make us more aware of your presence with us, that we may open our hearts to hear and obey your word to us.

We thank you that although you are beyond our comprehension, you have reached out to us in the Man Jesus, who in his teaching and in his life and death showed us in a down-to-earth way what you are like and what we should aim to be like. When we look at him on the cross we see how we hurt you when we hurt others, and his prayer, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing", was a reflection of your nature, shown even in extreme human pain, humiliation and awareness of approaching death.

May that picture pierce our hearts, that we may come to you with genuine sorrow, asking you for your forgiveness and trusting you for it. May our lives come to reflect more truly his victory over hatred and the fear of death.

He lives! May he live in our lives today. **Amen.**

We say the Lord's prayer together.

HYMN - Love divine, all loves excelling (HAP 267, STF 503)

BIBLE READINGS: Genesis 45: 1-15, Matthew 15: 21-28

SERMON

As a teacher trying to convey Bible knowledge to my pupils, I was often appalled by their ignorance of Bible stories that had once been common knowledge. However, the Joseph story was one exception, thanks to his "amazing technicolour dream coat"! And what a story it is - favouritism, the special coat, dreams of superiority, the brothers' jealousy, being sold into slavery, rising from slavery false accusation and prison to being the Pharaoh's right-hand-man, the brothers' dire need as famine struck, the brother they had rejected and ill-treated turning out to be their saviour, forgiveness, reconciliation with hugs and cries and tears of joy (and Joseph's was perhaps the greatest joy). The Gospel pre-figured, enacted, even before the coming of Jesus.

Today we see the Good News most clearly in the death of Jesus on the cross, his forgiveness of those who had brought about his death and then his rising again, to sit at God's right hand. But as someone has said, "The Cross is a revelation in Time of an eternal event". Even before the coming of Jesus, as in this Joseph story, God has always given an awareness of what is right and of our failure to achieve it, and has always worked to rescue us, to show us his forgiveness and bring about reconciliation, with him and with each other.

We, like the brothers, need to have our eyes opened to what we've done and to his amazing grace. His gift is not forced on us, it is offered. It is for us to trust his generosity and to receive it with thanks.

And of course since the coming of Jesus, other things that were always there, always implied, have also become more starkly clear: God's will to forgive, to be "with us", to teach us through our life experiences, to help us to grow into the persons he wants us to be, is for ALL, not just for one chosen people. Abraham was called to be blessed and to be a blessing; ultimately that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him.

We are ALL the heirs of Abraham, All Israel, ALL chosen to be his priests, his conduit of rightness, of reconciliation, of renewal. God works in us and through us. That privilege and responsibility is offered to ALL.

How puzzling, therefore, is today's story from Matthew's gospel. If Jesus came to show us that God's love, his welcome, is offered to all, why this story where Jesus appears to show reluctance to respond to the Canaanite woman's plea? "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel....It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs". Why did those who arranged the lectionary readings not chose a different story - perhaps Jesus being approached by a Roman centurion, responding to his request by healing his servant at a distance, and also commending him warmly for his faith?

Or the story about the Samaritan woman at the well, whom he approached and asked for a favour (a drink of water). He then engaged HER in a deep spiritual conversation. A hated Samaritan! A despised woman - and not a very respectable one at that! Yet through her, many in that Samaritan village came to him, and believed in him. Surely that would have been a more fitting story to choose. Well, it's awkward, but it's there, recorded by Matthew. Why did Jesus appear to be so reluctant? He had briefly crossed into foreign territory, where he was less well known. He needed a break. He had been experiencing fierce opposition from the religious leaders of his own people, criticising his disregard for the minute details of Jewish customs, such as hand-washing before meals. (This wasn't merely a matter of hygiene, but of washing off any impurity that might have been picked up from contact with non-Jews - perhaps buying food or dishes from foreign traders).

Jesus had taught that it was not outward things - not what you put into your mouth that made you unclean, but what came out of you, wrong thoughts, words, deeds. At that point he left Galilee and began to travel through Gentile territories. A bit of a relief. Then he was approached by this woman. She evidently knew something about him, at least that he was Jewish ("Son of David") and that he was known to have healed people: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession!" At first he didn't respond. Was he testing her faith? Or perhaps waiting to see the attitude of his disciples. They hadn't learnt much: "Send her away, for

she keeps crying out after us". Jesus commented, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel". Why did he say that?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't travel to other parts of the world to teach and heal? He could have achieved world-wide fame. But he had at most three years of public ministry. The Jewish people had, through their history and scriptures, been prepared for his coming. At that time in particular they were expecting God's Messiah. Just imagine, if you lived in a largely illiterate world and your mission was to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to learn to read and write, but you only had at most three years, would you travel all over the place and spend a short time in each place, or would you start with those who already had a grounding, train them thoroughly, and then send them out to teach and train others? His disciples were to go out into the world and spread the word - once all that was to happen to him had happened. Perhaps that's why he said to them at one time that they would go out and do greater things than he had done. Their witness and effectiveness wouldn't be limited to one small country. But at that point in his earthly ministry he had to concentrate on "the lost sheep of Israel".

The woman didn't give up. She knelt before him: "Lord, help me." Still Jesus held out: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." She might have taken offence. The Jews did speak of themselves as God's children, and sometimes used the word "dogs" as a word of contempt for Gentiles. Mind you, that was the word for stray dogs. Jesus used a much gentler word, translated "their dogs". The idea is of puppies, loved pets. The woman was not put off. I wonder if it was his tone, or look.

With admirable quick wit she replied, "But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Jesus had briefly entered her territory - like a dropped crumb. Could she be blamed for eagerly seizing this opportunity? I can imagine his warm smile as he commended her for her great faith and said her request was granted. Her daughter was healed.

I wonder how long before some disciple, post Pentecost, visited that area in what is now Lebanon, and discovered that the foundations had already been laid - God's love and healing had already been experienced.

We too are both the dogs (the pets, the puppies) and the children. We have been offered God's undeserved kindness, his "grace" and it is our mission, having received it, to pass it on. Being reconciled with each other - cruel brothers or foreign foes, those of opposing views - should be our aim. The initiative is God's; ours is the response.

Yes, we often fail, like the disciples, but like them we learn, we grow, we trust that whatever we go through, God is with us, he works for good with us.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, on the cross you prayed for us, and you continue to pray for us. Help us as we join with you in our prayers of intercession for others and for ourselves.

In this world where there is so much chaos and darkness, may your Good News be a shining light, bringing order and peace to individuals and communities that suffer.

As we think of the wars in Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, in Sudan, and in other lands that we only hear about intermittently, we sometimes do not know exactly who or what to pray for. Even as Christians we disagree about who is right and wrong, depending on our knowledge or interpretation of the news. So we can only pray that where there is the intention to act in hate, to terrorise, destroy or humiliate, you will "confound their knavish tricks"; where suffering is caused to the "other" in self-defence and with the intention of restoring peace, we ask that you will guide leaders to make the best choices and never to assume that might is right, and that we the people, along with our leaders, will always be prepared to listen to opposing views, to voice our own with honesty and courtesy, and never to treat the opponent with contempt or loathing.

We bring before you those of our own community who are suffering, with health or family problems, fears for the future, ill-treatment or loneliness. May your love and peace be given to them, and where we can be your instruments in bringing this about, guide us towards that. We pray for all carers, that they may be supported and shown appreciation.

We pray also for Church leaders, often over-burdened. May they know your renewing strength, and our appreciation.

We thank you that even when there is so much that is wrong, so much unhappiness, there is also so much kindness, so much to lift our spirits. The world of Nature, though despoiled, is still amazingly full of beauty and wonder, resourcefulness and renewal.

Lord Jesus, through your offered forgiveness, your teaching and example, your presence with us, you provide hope for us and the world around us. Thank you. Help us to contribute to the good which is your will. **Amen.**

HYMN - Let love be real - (StF 615) (tune Londonderry Air)

FINAL PRAYER

Throughout today and the coming days, may we each remember that God is with us, and live in that confidence. **Amen**