

**SERVICE OF WORSHIP FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL
CONGREGATIONS ON THE 16th August 2020**

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Welcome to this service of worship, on this Sunday the 16th August. To the members of the Shepparton Uniting and the Shepparton Rural Congregations, and to our friends who are joining us through the social media and those who have received the hard copies of this service.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodian of this land in which we live, work and worship. To the elders and members of the Yorta Yorta Nation, past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you!
May the nations be glad and sing for joy, because you judge the peoples with justice and guide every nation on earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you!
Let us worship God.

Hymn: 147 (TiS) 'To God be the glory'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

All thanks and praise, glory and honour, be yours at all times, and in every place, true and living God. We praise you that through your eternal Word you brought the universe into being and made us in your image. You have given us this earth to care for and delight in, and with its bounty you preserve our life. We thank you that you bound yourself to all people with promises of a gracious covenant and called us to serve you in love and peace.
Almighty God, most merciful Father, who created us for life together; we confess that we have turned from your way.
We have not loved you with all our heart; we have not loved one another as you commanded.
We have been quick to claim our own rights, but careless of the rights of others. We have taken much and have given little. Holy God, whose compassion never ends, we ask you to forgive us our sins, and to blot out all our guilt, that we may know again the joy of your Spirit;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(UiW – Adaptation)

Declaration of Forgiveness: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I declare to you all, your sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Reading: Mathew 15: (10-20), 21-28

Message: 'Dogs are in'.

On a car trip to Sydney one year, we stopped for a coffee and something to eat at a restaurant on the highway. As we walked in the door, I noticed a sign at the doorway that says, 'Dogs not allowed'. But as I walked to where the coffee machine was, I could see a man sitting at a table and beside him was a dog. I assumed it was his dog.

I was surprised to see this man with his dog inside the restaurant, especially after reading the sign 'Dogs not allowed' sign at the door. Before long, a staff who worked at the restaurant walked up to the man and talked to him, pointing at the dog. The man got up slowly, led his dog out of the restaurant.

I was quite surprised by what I felt toward that man and his dog. I felt sorry for him and the dog, but I was also happy that they had left the restaurant. You see, there ought to be a place for dogs I thought where they can eat but not at the same place as the human customers. My thinking was, the dog is probably dirty and who knows what kind of germs he carries. In short, that dog was a threat to my health and well-being. Please don't get me wrong, I love dogs. But dogs have their place and it's certainly not the same place as mine.

If you are a dog lover, you might disagree with me – and that is the point that I want to explore with you in this sermon this morning.

There are those who love dogs and see no threat or barrier between them and their dogs. And there are, of course those who believe that dogs have their place, under the table if you like and not seated at the table.

That little introduction brings us to another dog story. The story in Mathew 15: 21-28. After Jesus taught both the Pharisees and the disciples about purity laws regarding the washing of hands, Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. A Gentile territory where an unnamed Canaanite woman came shouting at Jesus to help her daughter.

What follows is tough and probably one of the toughest conversations you could read in the whole bible. It is another dog story!

After a brief silence ignoring her plea, Jesus' reply doesn't sound like Jesus at all. It doesn't sound like the Jesus who says, "let the little children come to me". It doesn't sound like the Jesus who stops and heals an unnamed woman bleeding who touches the hem of his garment. It doesn't sound like the Jesus who, instead of sending the crowd away, tells the disciples to give them something to eat.

Jesus' response just doesn't sound like Jesus at all "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It certainly sounds like a rejection of the plea from this unnamed Canaanite woman to heal her daughter. Here one can argue, if Jesus is right about being sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel then what is he doing in Gentile territories?

Could it be that the woman, seeing Jesus in Gentile territories expects that he was coming to offer the Gentiles the same blessings as he had done to others? Purely speculative but a fair question to ask.

After the rejection, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", the unnamed Canaanite woman came and knelt in front of Jesus and begged, "Lord, help me." She knelt in recognition of Jesus', addresses him as LORD! Help me! If that doesn't melt your hearts, then it ought to wake us from our biblical slumber.

There is more...after she begged Jesus for help, Jesus replied "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." To which this unnamed Canaanite woman humbly responded, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that falls from their master's table."

She is not asking for a share of the children's food. She did not come to claim a place at the table, crumbs from the master's table is enough for her. She even accepted the dog status that was given her She knew that...She refuses to dispute that Jesus' mission is to Israel first, nevertheless, she believes Jesus will have more power left over from what Israel does not need or want. She is called a Canaanite woman to evoke historical conflicts because there were no Canaanites living in the first century, but the woman persists.

Then Jesus replied, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." Her daughter was healed instantly.

This shocking yet powerful story is part of Jesus' teaching about purity and holiness. Remember the first part, chapter 15: 1-19 the dialogue with the Pharisees about hand washing and Jesus called them hypocrites as Isaiah prophesied 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

'It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles. For it is from the heart that evil intentions come.'

The Israelites had all sorts of laws regarding purity and holiness and all to do with wholeness. The Mishnah and Tosefta provides a map of how people are ranked and classified in their purity system. T. Megillah has it in this order: 1. Priests 2. Levites 3. Israelites 4. Converts 5. Freed slaves 6. Disqualified priests 7. *Netins (temple slaves)* 8. *Mamzers (bastards)* 9. Eunuchs 10. Those with damaged testicles 11. Those without a penis¹

'It shows how holiness means wholeness, people with damaged bodies are ranked last. Their lack of wholeness signals a corresponding lack of holiness.'²

During the time of Jesus, holiness and purity was also Geographical. Those who live outside the boundaries of Israel are unholy and lack wholeness and mostly referred to as Gentiles.³

The reason why this is important for our reflection today is that our passage – Mathew 15: 21-28 ought to be read together with the first part Mathew 15: 1-20. They are two parts of Jesus teaching about purity and holiness. The first part Jesus uses dialogue, and here in the second part Jesus demonstrated what he says in the first part.

Now, a new narrative is developed. He has broken the hypocrisy of purity and holiness in syllables with the love and compassion that comes from the heart. He deliberately crashes through the geographical boundaries by venturing into Gentile territory. He has showed what the Israelites had missed. To be a blessing for the nations. They have become more concerned for their human constructed holiness and purity rules that they neglect their duty of care.

The message here is that the new Israel, the one that will fulfill the call of the old Israel will bring the promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to life.

The new narrative is that through Jesus – the dogs are in! They are children of God. The Gentiles, the blind, the leper, the orphan, the beggar, the Eunuch, the refugee. The disabled, the foreigner, the migrant. They are in not because they can get out of their circumstances, but that Jesus Christ is breaking down the barriers to reach out to them. Purity and holiness based on lip service rather than purity and holiness that flows out of compassionate and loving hearts can turn a whole nation outward towards others.

Our inclusivity, our love and our compassion in Christ is our purity and our holiness. It cannot be forced, coerced or pressured from outside. It can only flow freely from the heart. **Amen.**

Notice re. Offering:

Prayer of Intercession:

¹ T. Megillah 2.7

² Neyrey, Jerome H. *The idea of purity in Mark's Gospel* University of Notre Dame

³ Buchanan, George W. 1963 "The role of Purity in the Structure of the Essene Sect." *RQ* 4:397-406.
1968 "Things that defile (Mark VII.14) and the Law in Mathew and Mark." *NTS* 15: 75-96

Loving God, as you once heard the pleas of a Canaanite woman for her daughter, hear our prayers for the well-being of your world and your church.

We praise you, O God, that you are the God of all nations: we bring to you our prayers for all the peoples of the world.

We pray for all leaders of nations, for all with political and legal responsibilities. We pray especially for your people who are pushed to the edges of society by political oppression, economic injustice or by discrimination because of race, gender or religious beliefs.

We pray for the indigenous people of this country, who have been made outsiders in their own land. Shake our prejudices and complacency and teach us a faith that is fearless in confronting injustices.

We praise you, O God, that your church is a house for all nation: we bring to you our prayers for all who confess your name.

We pray for all leaders of churches, for the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches and all ecumenical bodies.

We pray for the church in hostile and dangerous places, and for all who minister here in your name.

We pray especially for those who are not welcomed to eat at your table, for those excluded from priestly ministry, for all who are condemned for unorthodox belief.

Shake our certainties and securities and teach us a faith that is open to receive new understanding.

We praise you, O God, that you turn away no one who call on you for help: we bring to you our prayers for all who are in need.

We pray for the sick and the sorrowing and for those who care for them.

We pray especially for those who are marginalised by disability or disease, for those with mental illnesses, for the elderly and those shut away in institutions.

Shake our indifference and neglect and teach us a faith that is compassionate to plead the cause of those in need.

Loving God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer. Amen.** (LUP – J. Nelson 1999)

Hymn: 164 (TIS) 'The great love of God'

Blessing: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

MAJOR WORKS CONSULTED

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