

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Nancy Hands. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to Worship: Lamentations 3:22-23: 'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.'

The touch of Jesus calls us into new life. Let us open our eyes to his presence among and around us, and offer him our praise and worship.

Hymn Come, let us sing of a wonderful love (Singing the Faith 443)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BZfXTCUbr8>

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this Gospel to tell
joyfully came,
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderers, home!
Wonderful love,
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love!
Come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride:
seeking to be,
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Words: Robert Walmsley (1831-1905)

Music: Wonderful Love (Watson), Adam Watson (1845-1912)

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of love, we praise you for all you are and all you reveal to us through Jesus. He removed the greatest barrier between ourselves and you; by the power of the Holy Spirit, you enable us to tear down the fences we collectively create, which prevent us from living and loving in accordance with your will. You are a God of endless mercy and grace, loving equally all you have made. We adore you.

Loving God, we come to you in sorrow and shame for the times we have allowed prejudice to distance us from those you would draw close to. We bring to you the times when we have been too proud to ask for help and have felt more deserving than others. We acknowledge the times we have been quick to judge, been silent when witnessing discrimination against others, and when we have failed to show empathy. We acknowledge the times we have been tempted to abandon hope and been lacking in faith.

Forgive us, we pray and raise us up to love and serve those you have put before us. In Jesus name, **Amen.**

Thanks be to God, who is compassionate and gracious and does not hold our sins against us. Through Jesus, we are forgiven, loved and free. Amen.

Our Bible reading from Mark's Gospel this morning, tells two interwoven stories of very different, desperate individuals who seek out Jesus.

Reading: Mark 5: 21-43.

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the lake. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples

said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Reflection

Jesus broke purity laws in both these stories. We might view such laws in the Hebrew bible as senseless, unfair or ignorant, but it is important for us to recognise the overriding importance of God's holiness to ancient Israel. Worship life and social life were inseparable and had to fit into a world view where everything strictly had its place in order to keep the people holy, and anything out of place was necessarily unacceptable and unclean. According to Leviticus 15, any person who had a discharge - and particularly, any woman who was bleeding - could have no contact with any other person: social, religious or familial. Anyone who touched or was touched by her, became ritually unclean themselves, and so also had to separate from society and worship, and go through a purification ritual before reintegration. The same applied to anyone who had contact with a dead body.

That helps us to understand the significance of what Jesus does in these stories. He has contact with and heals a woman who has been chronically haemorrhaging for 12 years, and a dead girl who is 12 years old. Jesus is a rabbi who knows the Law better than most, but he defies the rules, challenging the centuries-old definitions of clean and unclean, for a higher law. He sees, acknowledges, understands and makes time for hurting individuals who

matter more than rules, demonstrating that instead of the sick patients' contamination passing to him, his wholeness passes to them. It is not the uncleanness that is contagious, but his holiness, which leads to freedom, restoration and relationship. Jesus introduces a new rule of love which overtakes the ancient laws, and calls no-one untouchable.

A 'Peanuts' cartoon appeared on Facebook a little while ago, with a hint of this: Linus says to Lucy, "You know what else is highly contagious? Kindness, patience, love, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude. Don't wait to catch it from others: be the carrier."

Mark always has pertinent points to make in his selection and placing of Jesus' miracles in his Gospel account, and there are strong elements in these encounters in chapter 5. It is a story of interruptions, of hope, of desperation for survival, of the individual being more important than the crowd, and of faith overcoming fear.

We heard about Jesus calming the storm on the lake last week, as the disciples were taking him 'to the other side': the Gentile side. There, in the region of the Gerasenes, Jesus cured a notorious, much-feared man, believed to be possessed by demons. The consequence of the healing was the costly loss of a herd of 2000 swine over a cliff, and

Jesus was asked to leave. So he returned in the boat to Capernaum, where he was surrounded on the shore by a great crowd. This was another opportunity to teach. But a man of status pushed through, claiming Jesus' undivided attention. Jairus would have been well known and respected as a synagogue leader: a man who could expect to meet a rabbi as an equal. But Jairus threw himself at Jesus' feet, begging for him to come and heal his dying daughter. A man in his position would usually send a servant if he wanted someone fetched, but his desperation, and his conviction that Jesus was his only hope, drove him to forget pride, convention and the opinions of the crowd, as he threw dignity to the wind. Time was running out for his child, and Jesus responded by immediately going with him, followed by the crowd.

Imagine Jairus' distress when someone else interrupts! Here comes the middle of Mark's 3-part narration: an example of extreme faith, witnessed by a distraught Jairus. The outcast sick woman has pressed guiltily through the crush of bodies, hiding her identity, believing that just touching the edge of Jesus' cloak would make her well. Perhaps she had heard tell of him healing the leper, or the paralysed man - or even the demoniac. She believed that only he could help her; she had exhausted all other options and she was destitute. Her faith was stronger than the fear

of discovery and consequent punishment for knowingly breaking purity law. Her life depended on that intentional fleeting touch of his cloak, and when she made it, she knew herself restored to health. She wanted neither notice nor recognition; she was used to being invisible. But Jesus knew power had gone out of him. He did not have magic in his clothes - and he wanted that known; her faith had touched the core of him, and strength had left him for her. But he knew she needed more. If she slunk away now, her new found health would be marred by the guilt of having broken the law and making the Master - and all those she pushed past - unclean. Jesus' intention was for her mind and soul as well as her body; she must have her personhood restored, and so he makes a demand of her: to come out and be seen. How devastating to be exposed and have to declare her shame and sin in 'the whole truth', unburdening all that had blighted her for 12 years. Amazingly, to her and the crowd, instead of recrimination and blame, she sees only love and compassion in Jesus' eyes. He restores more than her ailing body; he accepts her honest confession and confirms her as a child of God, claiming it is her faith that has brought her wholeness. He uniquely calls her 'daughter', giving her new meaning, new purpose, new hope, new strength and new peace. What a gift!

And poor Jairus? (Here's part three of Mark's account: completion of the story sandwich!)) Already distraught about his little girl, he has witnessed Jesus' compassion for an unclean woman, and his inexplicable healing power. But at what cost? It has taken time his daughter didn't have, and the messengers bringing the tragic news of the child's death, tell Jairus that he need not bother Jesus any more. But Jesus tells the grieving father, 'Do not fear, only believe.' I wonder if Jairus was given courage by witnessing the faith of that unnamed, outcast woman? He does find faith enough to stick with Jesus, witnesses him ignoring contempt and ridicule from the mourners, and is there for possibly the defining moment of his life. Jesus takes the hand of his lifeless little daughter, and says in his native Aramaic, 'Talitha cum' - literally, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise'. It is an intimate, private moment of healing, showing Jesus' total concern for this 12-year-old - down to even reminding her parents that she needs food!

Faith and hope are vital for our lives; they connect us to Jesus, who accepts and loves us just as we are. He recognises no barriers of class, age, status, education or ethnicity; no barriers of guilt, ignorance, reputation or past history. His arms are open, but sometimes we are reluctant, and we may listen to the scepticism of 'the crowd'. It can take adverse circumstances or a crisis to

make us desperate for help and run to him. Faith in God is reaching out - trusting that he knows best, rather than trusting in a miracle.

Oswald Chambers, a Scottish Baptist wrote, 'Faith for my *deliverance* is not faith in God. Faith means, *whether I am delivered or not*, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace.'
(Italics are mine.)

If you think about it, lots of people touched Jesus that day and they were not changed or healed from the problems some will have had. Many of them were there to see what he would do, or witness something out of the ordinary. Being near him, or those close to him, was clearly not enough to receive his power - either for them or for us. But the woman saw Jesus as her Saviour and she came to him with empty hands. She was afraid, but she trusted 'and she told him the whole truth'. Jesus' response to her - and to us, when we can let go enough to express our need that honestly - is grace, assurance and deep connectedness. God doesn't work to our time scale or expectations; sometimes it seems he withholds what we ask, but with hindsight we often discover he had something better to offer us. Jairus knew what he wanted, but he was heartbreakingly made to wait. I expect he thought he deserved better, and that his claim on Jesus at that

moment should have taken priority. But perhaps his faith was not yet in the person of Jesus, or he had not realised there was more to wholeness than a healthy body. He had to learn to wait and trust Jesus himself, for a lasting hope - a resurrection hope, which would change his life forever. Verse 6 of Psalm 130, the Psalm set for today says, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope'. 'Do not fear', Jesus said to Jairus, 'only believe'.

Can we trust when God does not do our bidding? Can we be instrumental in removing barriers, rather than maintaining them? Can we welcome interruptions as opportunities to be channels for someone to accept themselves, to believe they are worth loving? May God's grace and mercy go before us, to help us live out his love, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Gracious God, thank you for the wonder of human life; for healing, for compassion and for love. Thank you for answered prayer, according to your will.

As we pray, we remember Jesus whose healing power overcame all obstacles and challenged all exclusions, and we pray for his healing touch in our lives and in our world.

We pray for all who feel outcast from society, that they may find places of acceptance to restore their dignity, and people to love them. Help us to strive to break down the barriers that separate the rich from the poor, the black from the white, the healthy from the sick, the foreigner from the national. Soften the hearts of leaders and regimes who oppress, persecute and discriminate. Change the minds of those who hate rather than understand, who judge rather than listen, who curry favour with the masses rather than recognise the value of each individual. We pray for all who are ill, especially the chronically sick in danger of losing hope and faith; for their carers and medical professionals; for those developing and delivering vaccines and remedies, for the good of humanity. We pray for those around the world, in fear of death from disease, disaster or war; for those who love them, and those who would relieve their suffering at cost to themselves. We pray for the pastoral care of the Church, for all who minister comfort and give time to those in need and suffering; for those who bring consolation to the bereaved, and ease the journey of the dying. We pray that our faith communities may grow without barriers, and be known as people and places of warmth and welcome.

Loving God, we have felt your touch on our lives, and we trust in your power to heal and to save. Prevent us from being an obstruction to someone else's wellbeing; keep us

always in your love and give us the faith and grace to minister your love and wholeness to others.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.

The 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 forever, Amen.

Hymn Just as I am (Singing the Faith 556)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcFp0-4RZzc>

Just as I am, without one plea
but that you died to set me free,
and at your bidding 'Come to me!'
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am! You will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am! Your love unknown
has broken every barrier down:
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Charlotte Elliott (1789 - 1871)

Music : Saffron Walden, Arthur Henry Brown (1830-1926)
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Blessing

May God whose word brings life from death, strengthen
our faith and hope.

May Christ whose touch brings healing to the helpless,
renew our faith.

May the Spirit whose breath brings peace to the troubled,
fill us with hope.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit, be with us, with those we love and those we find
hard to love, now and always. Amen.

First prayers adapted from Roots

For personal worship

Hillsong - The Power of your Love

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9_0jiO5ZRM

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