

This short act of worship has been produced by Helen Lunn for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. 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

Church, wake up!

Let us offer our lives once more
in an act of worship to our God.

Church, draw near!

Let us follow the call
of the one whose grace defines our lives.

Amen.

Hymn – O for a thousand tongues to sing (Singing the Faith 364)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dEfz6Vms>

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

He speaks; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together

Lord, we yearn to hear your voice.

Enfold us in your presence, and hear our voices, too:
the voices of the sick, the oppressed and marginalised;
those who have no voice, who cannot plead their needs.
Lord, let your voice be heard among us.

Do we approach you easily today, Lord God?
Do we come unthinking, out of habit, sure of our welcome?
Or have we had to overcome fear?

Like the Gentile woman
we throw ourselves upon your mercy.
Hear us as we call out to you, and meet us in our need.

Forgive us, Lord, for not listening properly.
In the clamour of a needy world,
we become deaf to individual voices.
We fail to hear those who are under our feet;
the ones who are different from us,
whose culture or face or ability don't fit,
whose creed is a threatening mystery
or whose lifestyle we judge.
Open our ears, Lord, so that we may know their need,
and respond in the fullness of healing love.

Lord Jesus, we praise you for your divine love,
shown to those you healed.
And we praise you for the hope
of a time when there will be healing for all,
and love will reign.
But we are human, bound by our prejudices,
our misguided instincts, our inborn fears;
and so we praise you for being human, too.
You know where we are coming from
when we speak from fatigue, anxiety or anger.
But you also know where we are going.

Lead us forward in faith, and enfold us in your divine love.
Heal our brokenness, help our fumbling humanity.
Let us carry the kingdom in a fallen world.
Amen.

Readings

James 2:1-10, 14-17

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show

favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Mark 7:24-37

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁸ “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹ Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “*Ephphatha!*” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Reflection

In the story of the Syro—Phoenician woman, Mark says something about boundaries. It is set in Tyre, beyond the historical borders of Israel, beyond the comfort zone for the Jewish Jesus and his followers. A Gentile woman, although showing deference by bowing at his feet, breaks convention. She seeks help from a man outside her culture and faith and

better him in an argument. Boundaries are being redefined.

For the early Christians, the issue of mission beyond Israel, of going beyond perceived boundaries, was dominant. We can see this clearly in Acts 10 with Peter and Cornelius.

Commentators suggest that Mark is referring to this in chapter 7 where Jesus talks of what defiles a person, probably because it says something important about the gospel.

What boundaries do we place around the preaching and living out of the gospel? Do we just preach and live out the gospel on a Sunday morning or do we live it out and preach it every day of the week through the way we live our life?

Do we expect outsiders to fit in before we accept them? How do we welcome someone who comes to our church or is new to our community? Do we treat them like the rich person or the poor person in the reading that we had from James?

Mark portrays Jesus as one who suggests there was a limit to where and how God ministers to people. We find it difficult to handle the idea that Jesus might have said an abrupt 'no' because of the gender and ethnic identity of the woman. This incident reveals the reality of Jesus' Jewish humanity. He was part of his culture. Our discomfort may reveal our understanding of Jesus and our own culture. Do we feel the

need to explain the story in a more favourable light? Are we willing to let Jesus' humanity stand?

James speaks forcibly about a different kind of boundary — between rich and poor. Right from the beginning, the Jesus people have challenged society's boundaries. What does pushing the boundaries mean for 21st century Christians?

To me pushing boundaries means living out Micah 6:8. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Because if we don't act justly and help out those who are in need how can we walk with God. This enables me to live out my Christian faith every day of my life and not just on a Sunday.

The Gentile woman stayed deferential but not cowed by Jesus' retort. She stood in the reality of her own worth and challenged Jesus to recognise her faith and her right to that which God gives. Eleanor Roosevelt said, 'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.' This Gospel incident gives us, as Christians, permission not to collude with other people's dismissal of us.

In the end, Jesus had the flexibility and humility to concede to the woman. He didn't hold on to a superior status to feed his ego, but enlarged the boundaries of the gospel and extended

God's 'commonwealth' of love. Can we follow his example?

Communication is key to today's Gospel reading. Jesus was blunt, even rude, to the Gentile woman. She responded with an intelligence that revealed her faith and got her what she wanted. The deaf man had limited ability to be understood. His friends acted as his advocates and Jesus communicated through touch and symbol. It is as important to be open to the voices of others, as to find and use our own voices.

Sometimes we need to be imaginative and creative to use our voices. The Gentile woman flouted convention by going to Jesus. To seek care for the family from outsiders was normally a man's role, as with Jairus' daughter. The Gentile woman didn't allow this to deter her, but used what she had to win Jesus over.

The slaves of the southern United States of America used secret codes to communicate escape plans. The spiritual 'Steal away to Jesus' was sung to alert the chosen that tonight was the night for the rendezvous. In the midst of cruelty and oppression, they found a way to reclaim their voices and find power, right under the noses of the unsuspecting slave owners.

How can we find our voices? What is important for us in our

homes, schools, work places, churches, communities and world? What stops us from speaking up? Are Christians sometimes just too nice? The story of the Gentile woman gives us permission to answer back. We don't need to be aggressive; neither do we have to be doormats.

How do we hear God's voice in others, even if from another tradition? Jesus rejected the woman's request but then changed his mind. Perhaps he saw a reflection of God in her persistence in seeking healing for another. Even Jesus was challenged not to deny God's grace to those who seek in faith.

Are we advocates of those whose voices are restricted? The deaf man's friends helped him gain access to Jesus. Are there groups or individuals where we live who are trying to get their voices heard? How can we support them?

This year we are going to see new people arriving in our communities from Hong Kong and Afghanistan and maybe other areas of the world. We have the opportunity to welcome them with open arms and be willing to help them in any way that is needed.

In both stories Jesus enters into a relationship. He engages the woman in conversation. He communicates with the deaf man. This engagement enables God's healing to break into the world

and radically alter the lives of those concerned. What does building relationships mean for the quality of our communication? Are there people on the edges of our church life with whom we have little contact? How can we broaden and deepen our relationships? What might be the consequences?

Let us turn our church into a place where all are welcome and people feel that they are loved no matter who they are or where they come from.

Amen

Hymn – Let us build a house where love can dwell (Singing the Faith 409)

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

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive;
built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space,
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Mary Haugen (b.1950)
Words and Music ©1994, GIA Publications Inc.,

A time of prayer

God whose peace knows no borders,
as we watch the aftermath of the withdrawal of American
troops in Afghanistan and see the chaos at Kabul airport and
bewilderment on the faces of people left behind, we pray
urgently for your peace to descend. We pray for those who are
fearful, for people whose circumstances have suddenly and
racially changed, help them work out what to do and find the
ways and means to do what is necessary to stay safe. We pray
for those now in charge of the country. May our anxieties
about the way they will rule move us to pray with passion for
Afghanistan.

Lord bring peace,
and may your love be known by all.

God whose comfort knows no borders,
hurricane Ida has left a trail of destruction in Mississippi and
with a rising death toll we pray for the communities that have
been deeply affected by the storm. Give the emergency
services resilience and patience as they work to rescue people
and restore their vital services. For those families who have
suffered loss, please bring them support and kindness as they
come to terms with what has happened. As communities
rebuild, we pray they would have the resources to regroup,
restore and recover from this natural disaster and be able to
move forwards.

Lord bring comfort,
and may you love be known by all.

God whose compassion knows no borders,
with the new school term just getting going for some and
looming for others we pray for everyone moving on this
September. Whether changing year groups, schools or heading
off to university for the first time help our young people as
things change this autumn. We are particularly mindful of
those for whom last year was very difficult – with Covid,
disruption to routines, difficult times with home learning and
personal loss. May all of the children who have had a hard time
know compassion and care and may this year be calm and
ordered, filled with fun and purpose.

Lord bring compassion,
and may your love be known by all.

God whose care and concern knows no borders,
Covid still dominates all of our news cycles. It feels like there
are very big differences across our world with some places
heading out of restrictions and people feeling life is getting
back to normal, and others still struggling with the disease and
a lack of vaccinations. Please give world leaders the motivation
and determination to help everyone manage Covid. Help those
who make complex decisions about vaccinations, work out
how to provide jabs for the poor as well as the rich. We pray

for wisdom and calm as we approach the winter, for timely and
sensible decisions and for health and safety for our friends,
family and neighbours.

Lord bring care and concern,
and may your love be known by all.

God of joy,
we thank you for the joy the Paralympics has brought to us in
the last couple of weeks. Watching fellow human beings
overcoming adversity and triumphing in their sports is
exhilarating and heartening. Thank you for all of the athletes
who have competed. As they head home may they feel they
have worked to the best of their ability and know how
inspirational they are.

Lord bring more joy to this world,
and may your love be known by all.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn – Tell out my soul (Singing the Faith 186)

Sing/read/pray proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srkfvhANW7Y>

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name — the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)

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Blessing

Alert to the voices of all your children, Lord,
we leave with listening refreshed.
Tuning in to the cries of the world,
we lend our ears to the needy.
We hear their pleas as if they come from you,
and we ask the faith and grace to answer.

Amen.

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