

➤ ***O let the power fall on me***

Call to Worship

We come together to praise God in body, mind and spirit.

We learn and discern through God's Word and each other.

We come together to experience awe in God's sight.

We yearn to live in community and in peace, sharing and caring.

We come together to receive God's gifts and share them with each other.

Thanks be to God for wisdom, faith, and hope! Let us worship God in prayer...

† Prayer

God pierce our hearts with your love – break them open into greater capacity – break them open that we might hold more of the world's suffering and joy – that we might share more of the world's despair and hope. Lord, break our hearts, as we stand in the gap between what is and what could be – break our hearts open to a largeness that holds the possibility of a better future for all the world's people. (Christine Sine, from Godspace)

Loving God, you bid us be all we can be, and you accept us as we are. We pray that by your grace and power, those things that are stumbling blocks to our spiritual growth may be overcome. Show us the way in this time of worship. Teach us through the events of our lives.

When our capacity to sin binds us with tension, enable us to relax by trusting in your forgiveness. When our situation is one of peril or distress, enable us to discover in your love the resource of restoration. When our frailties get us down and keep us there, enable us to laugh at ourselves by relying on your strength.

When our tendency to become burdened by our cares makes us anxious, enable us to respond to your invitation to participate freely in the grace and abundant life of Christ. Lead us, we pray, in the way of Jesus. **Amen**

Words of Hope

There is no greater good than the goodness of God – no forgiveness more thorough – no love more attentive, no power more enabling. Thanks be to God!

➤ ***Life's Railway to Heaven***

M. E. Abbey / Charles D. Tillman

*Life is like a mountain railroad
With an engineer that's brave
We must make the run successful
From the cradle to the grave
Watch the curves, the fills, and tunnels
Never falter, never fail
Keep your hand upon the throttle
And your eyes upon the rail*

*You will roll up grades of trial
You will cross the bridge of strife
See that Christ is your conductor
On this lightning train of life
Always mindful of obstruction
Do your duty, never fail
Keep your hand upon the throttle
And your eyes upon the rail*

*Blessed saviour, thou will guide us
Till we reach that blissful shore
Where the angels wait to join us
In that sweet forevermore*

*Blessed saviour, thou will guide us
Till we reach that blissful shore
Where the angels wait to join us
In God's great forevermore*

† Prayer for Illumination

God of compassion and community, with gratitude we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to your glory. Open our ears and our minds as we search your Word for wisdom and guidance. Help us to grow our gifts from you for the common good and rest in the knowledge of your love for all. Amen

Scripture

Acts 2: 43 – 47

Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Throughout our lives we continually experience growth and change. We learn from our parents, our siblings and friends, and from our larger connection with other social groups. Some learning is organized and well structured: schools, Sunday school, other adult study groups. Other forms of learning are contextual, experiential, and sometimes serendipitous – it is in our best interests to adopt a learning mode of interaction wherever we are. One common expression is "everyone has a story to tell." We learn from and about each other and ourselves when we share our stories.

The earliest Christian communities did not have buildings, committees, annual meetings, or budgets. They were simply gatherings of people who had heard and been transformed by the good news about Jesus. They considered themselves children of God and followers or disciples of Jesus, the Christ. They stood apart from the norms and values of the societies in which they lived and so were naturally inclined to gather together and to talk about their new understandings. In the euphoria of a Christ-centred hope, they shared whatever they had with each other, as there was need. They "*spent much time together*" and learned to communicate, worship, and live in new and life-giving ways.

Together, they were reaffirmed in their beliefs and in how they were to live life abundantly. Together, the poorest were not quite so poor and the richest were blessed with opportunities to be generous, and all practised loving God and serving their neighbour. They learned to survive in a challenging, and sometimes very hostile, world.

Many sense that we are living now in a challenging and hostile world – one in which we may feel isolated and alone. Learning the practicalities of the times in which each of us lives has been part of the human story and the Christian thread within that story. God has blessed each of us with hearts, minds and spirits, and it is important that we exercise and “grow” all of them. How will the times we are living in today “grow” our faith?

The flow of learning is multi-directional – we share our understandings of what it means to be called by God and guided by Jesus in a new, interconnected global community. Advances in medicine and health are shared to the benefit of the poorest and the most vulnerable. Teaching others how to pass on their skills and knowledge, teaching the teachers of tomorrow, empowers people and broadcasts the benefits of knowledge and skills. We learn all the time – intentionally and unintentionally – from teachers, from one another, from the environment and the world in which we live.

God too continues to teach us. There are many wonders and signs if we are willing and able to learn – if we have the eyes with which to see them. It is not enough to know what is right before the Lord – we must put it into practice. May God continue to grant us wisdom as we seek to fully live our faith in the world – sharing our personal stories and the gifts with which we have all been blessed.

The story shared from Matthew’s gospel today is not one I am especially fond of. Who wants to hear Jesus sounding so harsh? Who can reconcile his refusal to answer a woman pleading for his help – denying that he has anything to offer “her kind”? The traditional reading of this passage is that the Canaanite woman is passing some sort of test of faith – that Jesus doesn’t really mean what he says when he makes his exclusivist remarks about only ministering to the Israelites – when he calls her a dog. Some people like this interpretation – in part perhaps because it saves Jesus from looking like too much of a jerk. He doesn’t mean to be rude – he is just testing her faith – bringing to harvest the faith God has already planted in her. But I still don’t like it – I still believe there is another way of looking at it.

First of all, you need to embrace the notion of teaching and learning we discussed earlier – that it is part of the human experience – for all of us – in all cultures – at all times in our lives. And this means that it can be true for Jesus too. Jesus can learn – can grow and change – can be influenced – perhaps by a persistent, faithful, somewhat desperate mother of a sick child.

The theological implications of accepting that Jesus learns might challenge us a bit. Does that mean Jesus is not perfect – not complete or sinless? Or does it simply mean that Jesus' own sense of God's kingdom is challenged, stretched, and enhanced by his encounter with this fierce and faithful woman. Maybe Jesus really believes he was sent only to the Israelites – and the woman takes him on – persuading him that something larger is at stake.

Is it possible that this encounter helps Jesus to widen his own perspective? Was Jesus capable of ever harboring such attitudes? It is no sin to make an honest mistake – no sin to get startled – no sin to be unaware of something. So, if Jesus really did think at some point that he was supposed to limit himself to Israel, that was no sin. Maybe part of what it means for Jesus to be fully human is that he not only shares our vulnerability in terms of suffering and dying, but also has the genuine ability to learn through experience as we do.

Perhaps through this encounter Jesus learns that God's kingdom and his mission to enact that kingdom is bigger than he had initially imagined – more encompassing than he'd at first dreamed. And perhaps the reason Matthew makes sure to record the incident is to challenge his Jewish-Christian audience – and us – as we struggle with questions about who should be included in the church – about who we need to help and who might be safely considered to be beyond the pale? What is the scope of salvation?

This passage invites us to imagine that God's purpose unfolded throughout Jesus' life and ministry and continues to do so in our own lives and experiences. This tenacious and faithful woman – a complete stranger – pushed Jesus to reconsider – to learn, and to grow. Certainly for us – and maybe even for Jesus – the Canaanite woman in this story becomes an instrument of teaching by reminding us that in the end, the love of God needs to be available to all people.

We share God's love as we encourage the work of various ministries in the church and efforts throughout the world seeking healing, reconciliation, and an end to racism in its many forms. We share God's love as we donate to relief and uphold in prayer those suffering in Beirut following the recent devastating explosion. We see God's purpose continuing to unfold as we support one another through this time of pandemic separation and anxiety. We remember the struggles of early Christians living together and sharing what they had in common to celebrate the abundance God promises. The

love of God invites us to share our stories of faith – learning from and with each another. There still are many wonders and signs if we are willing and able to learn – if we have the eyes with which to see them. **Amen**

➤ ***“Abba, Abba, hear us,” we cry***

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† Prayer

Holy God who calls all that is into being – who calls us into Christ’s church – we thank you for the church that is our true home – for the mission of the church that is our true joy – for the ministry of the church that is our proper task.

We thank you for the ministry of Knox and Trinity churches – for all those over time who have named your name and lived your life.

We thank you for the ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada – for its steadfastness over time – for its faithful witness in the world.

We thank you for the ministry to which you have called each one of us and for the gifts of the Spirit that you have bestowed – gifts that enable us to serve you, O Lord, and to serve one another.

We pray this day for all those who stand in need of ministry – who stand in need of the gifts we may have been given to share – who stand in need of the diversity within the body of Christ.

We pray for the sick and the dying – for the powerful who are bewildered and for the poor who lack so much of what many take for granted.

We pray for the brutalized who wait for relief – for the tired who long for rest and for the energetic who seek ways to serve you Lord.

We pray for your mighty spirit upon us that we may more fully engage our baptism – that we may accept the costs that belong to our life with you – that we may embrace the joys only you offer.

Move us beyond ourselves, Holy One, to your newness. Make us light, make us ready, make us open – that we may become a resounding doxology through your passion

and into your victory. We pray in the name of Jesus, the risen Christ who encourages us to join our voices in prayer...

***Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen***

➤ ***Living God, your joyful Spirit***

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Blessing (*Psalm 67*)

O God, be gracious to us and bless us and make your face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere God.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which daily renews us – the love of God, that enables us to love all others – and the community of the Holy Spirit, that binds us together in one body, embrace us all. **Amen**

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day***

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