

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation, and that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it was home.

As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

➤ *Dance with the Spirit*

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

We have come, O God, seeking you...

Seeking your presence – your peace – your community

May we sense your presence here among us as we gather

Revive us again, O Lord, as we worship together!

† Gathering Prayer

Holy One, we have come to worship seeking you, yet you have been beside us all the time.

Help us to be more confident of your presence.

We give thanks for the joy of knowing you and praise you at all times. We delight that we can trust in you, O God. From the depths of our being and the fullness of our soul we feel blessed by your steadfastness.

Because you love and nurture us, O God, we know we can safely come to you for mercy...

I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven, and to you my sisters and brothers in Christ, that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word, and deed. I pray that God Almighty might have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life.

Amen

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May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life.

Amen

Words of Hope

Those who rely on God's grace cannot be defeated. Be at peace knowing that you are loved, and you are forgiven.

➤ *Lord, whose love*

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† Prayer for Understanding

O God of compassion, stretch our faith. Move us to journey as wide as your grace extends. Fill us with your Holy Spirit in the words of scripture today. Empower us to speak boldly of your justice in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

Scripture

James 2: 1-17

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7: 24-37

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter."

So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

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

Message

As we meditate and speak about our texts today, we pray in the words of Søren Kierkegaard: Lord! Give us weak eyes for things that do not matter and eyes full of clarity in all your truth. Amen

In his gospel, Mark gives us a picture of Jesus who is pushing boundaries – challenging the givenness of his times. He challenges the forces that hold people back from living life fully. His healing is about restoration to wholeness.

Since the beginning of time one of the ways we have identified ourselves is “place” – our tribe – our family – where we are from or where we are currently located – this gives us a sense of who we are. Location has been a marker of identity. In Mark’s time this sense of location had been undermined. The community was broken and when someone was ill they were even more pushed outside of the community and God. Jesus, in healing, restores people to community and to God.

In our story from Mark today we see this dynamic at work. Where do we experience God – how do we have a sense of God? Mark shows Jesus as the one who gives us a new sense of God – God that is not located in one particular place or rule or doctrine. Jesus, by his ministry and his location, shows how God can be experienced everywhere.

Mark has Jesus move from the desert – to the synagogue – to the home – to the field to show how God is found in each place. This breaks the confines of narrow religious understandings. Jesus pushes the boundaries of belief – widens sacred space to all of reality. Where do we experience God? God is everywhere – in everything.

God is not limited to our boundaries – not contained by our tribe or family or location – and this challenges our understanding of God. It can create tension about who belongs and who is an outsider. How affirming or inclusive are we? Do we draw boundaries about who can come in? Do we have limits as to how far we will go out?

Within Canadian society there are issues related to multiculturalism, racism, and Indigenous/settler relationships. On the global scene questions of inclusion/exclusion are writ large in many parts of the world. On the world stage we are playing out what we experience within a family system or a community setting – the issue of identity. The question is one of boundaries and enemy – of who is included – who is within the circle – and who is the outsider?

Not only that, but we also need to recognize that we tend to sit firmly inside whatever circle we have drawn for ourselves. It is safe and comfortable and predictable. Can we venture outside it? Can we move with Jesus into enemy territory?

That’s what Mark tells us Jesus does in our text today – he moves into enemy space – he goes to Tyre. Here he meets the ultimate outsider – a Gentile – a woman who speaks to Jesus – challenges and corrects him. It is far beyond the limits of normal – not just bumping up against the edge but hanging right over!

It’s here, just when we thought we knew who Jesus was – who he is – and what he is about that we are surprised by this story – and perhaps disappointed or dismayed. I mean he compares the woman to a dog! As much as I love our puppy, Enzo, and have loved the dogs in our life that came before him, Abigail, Madeline and Buddy – as much as you may value your own dog, it’s

still a pretty horrible thing to compare a person to a dog. It's a slur – there is no way to soften it. And it seems even worse in this context because Jesus calls this mother, who has fallen at his feet begging for mercy for her child, a dog. It's not nice.

It is particularly “not nice” if you think about the perspective of dogs in ancient times. Likely not that different from my experience of them in developing countries. In such places dogs are generally not house pets and we were always discouraged from approaching them. They were to be treated warily. Dogs in this context were natural scavengers, constantly on the prowl for food. They were often inbred, mangy, and accompanied by flies. They moved about wherever they wanted – walking right into a group of people to lay down and nap or stand under a table or beside the kitchen waiting for scraps. They barked incessantly at night and claimed first dibs on anything dead. They were shameless about defecating and procreating. They were tolerated, but often driven away with a switch or a rock when they became a nuisance. Calling someone a dog was and is dehumanizing – a way of keeping them well outside of God's grace.

A Syrophenician woman — an inconvenient outsider — barges into the house where Jesus is staying, bows down at his feet, and begs him to cast a demon out of her daughter. And Jesus, instead of being perfect and fully divine as we expect him to be, is all too human in his response, saying: *“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.”*

So, the woman challenges him — teaches him. Turning his slur right back at the man who insults her, she replies, *“Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”*

It is an uncomfortable moment in scripture to say the least! Awful. But perhaps it serves as a reminder to us that Jesus isn't perfect but both fully divine **and** fully human — a product of his time and place, shaped as we all are by the conscious and unconscious biases, prejudices, and entitlements of his culture. He is also God incarnate, still working out the scope and meaning of his divine vocation. He knows he's meant to share the good news. But even he needs to grow and take risks to truly discover how radically good that good news is.

Our hero is confronted and has his sense of inclusion first challenged and then expanded — he learns to draw the circle just a bit wider as he recognizes that God's kingdom includes a rainbow of experiences and people. The outsider is “in”.

This bold, audacious woman — this outsider — crosses all boundaries and obliterates cultural norms to advocate for her daughter — and in so doing she joins in the healing. She adds to what God is doing and brings a new reality — a new sense of God. She has pushed the boundaries and invited more of God's holy adventure to slide in. She reminds us that our frail human activity, and our words, matter. We grow with Jesus, joining him in pressing against those things that

hold us and the world back. Our hands and hearts are needed to push at boundaries that imprison – for the healing of this world.

Sometimes we need to move out of our comfort zones – to take a risk – we need to go somewhere else – somewhere new – and take our faith with us.

The story in the gospel today is a religious vision calling us to move toward breaking boundaries – to healing broken persons and communities. It is about a renewed sense of God – God everywhere. It is about a fresh sense of place and tribe and family – where there are no God-forsaken places – no one to be excluded – no one unwelcome. It moves us to try a new rhythm and hear something old with unsullied ears – to live creatively, joyfully and in harmony as we seek to participate with the divine in bringing peace and justice in our fractured world.

This is good news – affirming that even if we are a product of narrow visions of reality, we do not have to remain there. Good news is about transformation – reinterpreting some perceptions of reality – redefining us. A bold, wild, and radical faith is what's needed to follow Jesus. This is faith with legs and heart and action. The result of the woman's persistence is that her daughter is healed. Another result of this encounter is that it sends Jesus in the direction of drawing that inclusion circle ever wider as he travels deeper into Gentile territory to heal and feed and love. Jesus moved beyond the boundaries of his time – beyond what he thought he knew – beyond expectations – and so can we. We can draw the circle wider – take risks, push limits and grow in our faith just as Jesus did because we journey with him. **Amen**

➤ *To show by touch and word*

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† Offering and Prayer

Jesus asked his disciples what could anyone give in return for the gift of life? He challenged us to take up our cross and follow him. Whatever we offer in Jesus' name speaks of how we take up his challenge. Thank you for continuing to give with grateful, loyal hearts.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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God of mercy and healing, we offer these gifts as a way to show our gratitude for all we have been given. It is a way to love our neighbours – it is a way to remember the Sabbath. In the name of Jesus we celebrate your presence and give thanks for the opportunity to participate in your love. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

O God in whom we live and move and have our being we come to you in prayer as the summer season draws nearer to its close. We give you thanks for the occasions we have enjoyed to catch up with family and friends – to travel for recreation and restoration and let our worries go. We

are grateful for each moment to savour the beauty of creation. Refresh us for the season ahead we pray and renew our commitment to serve you.

O God, Jesus faced many demands wherever he went, and pressure from critics, whatever he did. We pray for all those who have not found rest this summer: for those whose work is stressful, exhausting, or unappreciated – for those whose livelihoods remain uncertain, because of the pandemic or through disasters caused by heat, fire, or storm. We pray for those with hard choices to make – about work or school or what comes next – about relationships and priorities – or about social policy and community leadership...

May they know your strength and guidance day by day.

Today we also remember those for whom this summer has been filled with suffering. We pray for those who have lost loved ones, and those facing an uncertain future or a difficult diagnosis. We pray for those who have lost their homes – for those who despair about the climate crisis and what can be done to repair the suffering earth.

We pray for all those who join efforts to relieve suffering of any kind. May each one find courage to face tomorrow in your company.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way. As we prepare to go from worship to service in the world, walk with us we pray, and show us how to live each day as those who follow Jesus, for we dare to pray the words he taught us... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

➤ *Pray for the wilderness*

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Blessing

Go forth from this place of Sabbath renewal into the world of chaos and activity. Carry the peace of Christ in your heart. Witness to and share your belief with all people. And may the blessing of God – Creator, Saviour and Spirit – nourish and embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*