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ORDINARY 23B

8th September 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

The kingdom of God is justice and joy – and that kingdom comes close today. Come into this space, Holy God, as I worship and learn, read and reflect. Come and show me something of your creativity, and your invitation to be a part of the change I want to see in the world.

Take a moment to be peaceful.

If you are able you may like to plant your feet on the floor and concentrate on your body being still (if this is not possible then do just sit quietly and comfortably). Notice how you feel and what you are thinking about and let those things float away giving thanks for each even if they are difficult feelings or thoughts.

When you are ready, raise your hands open before you and give thanks for the moment you are in.

Pause

Place your open hands on your lap and consider all that's happened this week and what you might want to lay down before God asking for help or offering thanks.

Pause

Lift one hand high in the air and think about what you will offer of yourself as you worship today.

Pause

Lower your hands and return to this resource. If you feel able offer the following prayer:

Loving God, I am here in this moment to worship you. Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Reading: Mark 7:24-37 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

Turn to today's passage from Mark's Gospel. Who do you relate to in this story? As the story begins, Jesus is weary and worn down, looking for rest and solitude. Is that where you are today?

Or perhaps, like the woman who appears later, you are desperate and a bit frantic, worried about her family. Or you are more like the man struggling with the failings of his own body, isolated from society. Or are you in the crowd, watching?

Who do you relate to? Who resonates with you?

Just like Jesus in this scripture today, we can find ourselves weary in the face of the climate crisis. The work we are called to do to campaign and take action for the environment can seem like a hopeless task. The work of God is seldom convenient for us. Tackling the climate crisis is not a 9 to 5 endeavour. Perhaps we relate to Jesus in today's reading – just

about ready for a rest when there is one more thing he needs to do to put the world to rights.

In this passage, Jesus appears to despair, for a moment. To lose his temper. To turn away from the woman in need. This is hard for us to read in a modern context. How could Jesus say such a thing? Or perhaps this story is here for all of us who have ever felt too tired to do the thing we know we must, too exhausted to act for justice and peace. We too might find ourselves despairing when we turn on the news, when we hear about rainforests decimated, wildfires burning, droughts and famines already affecting the poorest in the world. What is it that causes you despair?

And yet – and yet – though the work of environmentalism may feel hopeless, we are never without hope. The Syrophenician woman knows this. She is in the presence of God – she will not lose hope. The story – happily for her and her daughter - does not end in the middle of this passage.

We could get caught up trying to unpick how it is that Jesus has said such a thing, but that would be to take one verse out of context. We need to read to the end of the story. The daughter receives the gift of healing – a gift offered to each and every one of us, regardless of our ethnicity, nationality, or background. It is here, with salvation, where the story ends.

When we look at our melting world, how easy it is to feel the despair of the mother in the middle of the story. How easy it is to feel the story has ended right in the middle – with no hope of healing, and no sign of a future. How easy it is to feel that God has turned away from us and refused our planet the healing it so desperately needs. And yet – and yet – our story is not ended. God does not abandon us. What's the end of our story?

We have learned a salvation story that is so narrow. God's salvation story encompasses the whole cosmos. We need to expand our understanding of the gospel to include all that we too easily disregard and dismiss and exclude. In the scripture today, Jesus astounds everyone by stepping outside of the expectations they had of him. If we too are astounded, then we need to expand our understanding of the reach of God's salvation. If we too struggle to believe that God loves this blue planet we call home, then we need to expand our understanding of the reach of God's salvation. We need to have a little faith, like the Syrophenician woman, that healing is within reach.

And now we are called to be a living embodiment of that healing – to come alongside our hurting neighbour, and our hurting planet, and help. Inconvenient, exhausting, and seemingly hopeless though the work often is. How might God be inviting us to join in with the work of healing and salvation for the planet?

Responding in music

You might like to listen to one or more of these hymns as you reflect on the words you've just read. If any of the lines of the hymns particularly resonate with you, why not use that line as a prayer-mantra for today (repeating it over and over again, and meditating on what it might mean for you)?

696 STF – For the healing of the nations - [YouTube](#)

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy - [YouTube](#)

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice - [YouTube](#)

Responding in prayer

Creator God,
Thank you that at the beginning of time, you breathed life in to creation,
And you continue to dwell among us, here with me during this time of worship,
Rejoicing and celebrating in all that you have made.

Help me to notice the world around me, to see your love, your grace, your peace, flowing
through all things.

Help me to take the time to see life flourish,
And worship you as creator God.

Generous God,
There are too many ways in which I ignore how my life limits your creation.
For when my quick and easy choices have a lasting impact,
When I choose my own personal comfort over the earth,
I am sorry.

Show me, and show us – the whole human race – how to love your whole creation
To put life before ease, and commit to change.

Transformational God,
I am an agent of your change, and have been called to be alongside you in the journey of
renewal.

Help me not to take this calling lightly, but to speak up,
Using my voice to be part of transformation.

God who lives in and with creation,
Be with me here.

Empower and embolden me to be courageous,
That I might live for your glory in all the earth. Amen.

Blessing

Go out in peace, go out in grace, go out to seek justice and joy.
You, oh Lord, are the creator of all, including me,
Travel with me as I leave this place, carrying the fire of you – my Creator – in my heart,
always.

In Jesus' name I pray,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers

Monday 9th September

- Time to get creative.
- Today, if you can, why not make a prayer mosaic? You could take strips of tissue paper, bits of recyclable rubbish, the newspapers from the week that have piled up in the front room, or anything you like...and tear out strips or pieces in different colours and stick them to a piece of paper.
- You might like to make a particular pattern or shape – a cross, a representation of the earth, some praying hands if you feel particularly creative...or you might like to just enjoy the process. Tearing and sticking. Cutting and sticking. Arranging.

- As you make your mosaic, think about the week just gone. Pray for the people you have met. Pray for the news stories that have stuck with you. Offer prayers for those on your heart today.

Tuesday 10th September

- God of all grace,
Come and be known to me here, by your grace,
Show me how to put your love to work in the world,
Show me how to be a part of all that is good and wholesome and right,
Show me how to share the good news of your love with people I meet,
Show me how to follow you.
Amen.

Wednesday 11th September

- Today marks the anniversary of the bombing of the twin towers, and the beginning of the so-called 'War on Terror'.
- Today we pray for peace, for the kind of peace that brings healing, not more division, not more hatred, not the possibility of retaliation, but a deeper, shalom-peace.
- God of peace and justice, help our leaders to act for peace today, and every day.
Amen.

Thursday 12th September

- This is the day that the Lord has made. This day, the day you are living right now. As the worship hymn continues: 'let us rejoice and be glad in it'.
- It isn't always easy to rejoice or 'be glad', but the hymn writer is inviting us into recognise that today is a gift from God, and we can celebrate that – if nothing else.
- How are you celebrating the gift of today? How are you making use of it? How are you using it to offer worship to God?
Pray about that this day, as you are out and about.

Friday 13th September

- Seek out a single 10 minute slot of solitude and silence today.
- Instead of a prayer, just try to meditate, and hold a stillness in your heart. If you need to some words to fixate on, try this little eight-word sentence from Psalm 46:10: 'be still and know that I am God'.

Saturday 14th September

- Loving God, you walk with us in the hills and the valleys of life,
You rescue us when we go astray,
You welcome us back when we wander from you.
God who is shepherd, guide me on straight paths this day, and this weekend,
Amen.