

Pause to Reflect:

Who might be excluded in your community?

What does it mean for you to uphold Christ-like standards of love, hospitality and proclamation?

Hymn: StF 255 / H&P 139 **The Kingdom of God is justice**; or
StF 251 **Jesus Christ is waiting**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving Jesus, you showed grace to all. You challenged the accepted culture and practice, you met each person with love, feeding both body and soul. You spoke out against rules created only by ritual and reached out to include those pushed aside. Challenge me to do the same.

On this first Sunday of a new Connexional year I pray for all in ministry, leadership and employment within the Methodist Church.

- Ministers and lay people taking up new appointments.
- Churches exploring new patterns of mission and worship.
- Pioneers and fresh expressions.
- The newly formed Darlington and Teesdale Circuit.

I pray too for the wider world:

- Schools restarting after the summer break – positive new beginnings for students and teachers after a disrupted year.
- For countries at war.
- People fleeing their home to seek safety.

I pray for myself:

- Eternal God, fill me with your love;
- Saviour Jesus, inspire me by your hospitality to outsiders;
- Holy Spirit, empower me to proclaim your hope for all.

Amen

Blessing: StF 648 God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you...

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Darlington District Worship at Home 5 September 2021



Call to Worship:

**Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!
I will praise the LORD as long as I live;**

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Psalm 146: 1-2

As we begin a new Church year it is our joy and privilege to give praise to God, to share together in worship whether we are gathered together or meeting in many places. We worship God: Father, Son and Spirit, who is always with us. **Amen**

Hymn: StF 88 / H&P 16 **Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation**

Prayers of Praise, Thanksgiving and Confession:

Almighty God, maker of the land and the seas, the planets and the stars, the universe in all its variety and beauty, we praise you.

Jesus, Son of God, we thank you for your willingness to come to earth, born a baby, living in an ordinary home, working at a carpenter's bench, learning the Hebrew scriptures. Willing at the end to give it all up, dying in agony to reconcile us to your Father.

We did not deserve such sacrifice, yet you were willing to give your life that we may live.

In a moment of quiet we confess our sins.

Jesus says to each of us today 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Come cleansing Spirit, that we may rise renewed to follow Jesus more closely day by day. Thank you for your life giving energy empowering us today. **Amen**

We share in the Lord's Prayer: **Our Father...**

Reading:

The rich and the poor have this in common:
the LORD is the maker of them all.

Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor.

Do not rob the poor because they are poor,
or crush the afflicted at the gate;
for the LORD pleads their cause

Proverbs 22: 2, 9, 22-23

Reflection:

A few weeks ago Sonia Hicks addressed the Methodist Conference as our new President. She told the painful story of her Great Aunt being rejected by her local Methodist Church. Then she challenged us all to consider what it means for us today to live out the claim in Galatians 3: 28 that we are *all one in Christ*. Sonia suggested that to do so we need to uphold standards of *love, hospitality and proclamation*. Today's Gospel reading from [Mark 7: 24 – 37](#) helps us to explore these themes. Here is a retelling of the first part:

Do you know what it is like to watch your child go through hell?

Have you watched the mental health of one you love go down to the depths, and felt total helplessness to do anything to help?

It was like that with my daughter, and I can tell you it is agony, a pain deeper than any physical injury. I was desperate.

Then I heard that a stranger was in town. He came quietly, he didn't want anyone to know he was there, keeping himself to himself, but a wonderful friend told me the secret of this foreigner. He is a miracle worker she said, and told me of his reputation. So in my desperation I went to plead with him. It broke all social conventions to go, to fall at his feet, to beg him to help my little girl.

I was trembling in fear, as I pleaded with him to release her from the spirit inside her. I expected to be rebuffed, after all I had dishonoured him by intruding in this way. Yet, he gave me his

attention, listened to my pleas. He gave me time. He showed he cared. The exchange that followed may sound rude to you, but in his eyes I saw the deeper meaning. His first task was to challenge the Jews, but there was room for all in his Kingdom. He looked with a love I cannot explain, and when he claimed the demon had left my girl I was in no doubt that he had acted. I dashed home to look, hardly daring to hope and yet somehow convinced that in that moment our world had changed.

Jesus has crossed the Syrian border to take time out from his costly exchanges with the Pharisees and teachers. He needs a break, but even in Tyre news of who he is leaks out and he cannot rest. The Greek woman is desperate enough to break all the rules for her daughter. In Mark's retelling he emphasises the marginalised status of this woman – her gender and racial identity set her apart. He also uses language his Jewish readers will recognise from the cultural tit-for-tat insults exchanged between Jews and gentiles. Yet in the banter recorded Jesus softens the 'dogs' to 'little dogs' (family pets) and ultimately Kingdom hospitality is extended. All will eat.

The healing of the man who cannot hear or speak also takes place in gentile territory. Jesus defies expectations of ritual cleanliness by spitting and touching the man's tongue. Imagine how we would feel about this today in Covid-19 Britain and perhaps we can begin to sense the revulsion of Mark's Jewish readers. Yet the unclean saliva becomes the instrument of healing. The outsider becomes the focus of the Kingdom and despite being told to stay quiet the witnesses proclaim the miracle.

These healings are recounted between the feedings of 5000 Jews and 4000 Gentiles and mirror the healings of Jews in [chapter 5](#). Mark is deliberately building the story. Jesus came to Israel to fulfil the law and prophesies, and in doing so to challenge the way in which they had been restricted. Mark makes it clear: Jesus' love is for all, the hospitality of the Kingdom is for Jews, for Greeks, for male and female, rich and poor, those who are represented by others and for those who come themselves. As a result, those who meet Jesus naturally proclaim what they have experienced.