



Prayers and Reflection for Sunday 16th August 2020 'Insiders and Outsiders'

Welcome to this act of worship. Although we are a dispersed community we gather together as one body as we come before God this summer day. This made me smile in the midst of all the heat this week.

A joyful summer blessing...¹

May God bless you
with a warm day
and a comfy sun-lounger.

May God bless you
With a good book,
a cold drink
and a choc-ice.

May God bless you
With a work-free afternoon
and the joy of summer.

Ruth Burgess

Sending prayers and best wishes to you all.

Revd. Helen Hollands
Assistant Chair of District (Eastern Area)

¹ Ruth Burgess, *Summer* Wild Goose Publications 2020 Compilation Ruth Burgess pg. 316

Call to worship: Psalm 133:1 How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity (NRSV)



2

Hymn³

- 1 In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.
- 2 In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

² John Muafangejo (1934-1987) Linocut on paper 1981

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³ Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 685
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3 Join hands then all the human race,
whate'er your nation be;
all children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

4 In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north;
all Christlike souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

John Oxenham, pseud. (1852-1941)

Opening prayers⁴

Gathering God,
you call each one of us,
wherever we have journeyed,
whatever life has thrown our way,
whoever we love,
to come and share at your table.

Remind us that your grace reaches beyond our borders,
our fences and barricades.
In the blink of an eye you see beyond the constraints we impose
offering each one of us your embrace.

God of mercy, forgive us our divisions,
our petty feuds,
our hard-hearted desire for power;
when you call us to the tender ministry of washing feet,
and offering food to those who long for inclusion.

Encourage us to a generosity of Spirit
and openness of heart.
Take down the walls we build to surround ourselves
that we might truly see your image
reflected in everyone. **Amen**

Genesis 45:1-15 (NRSV)⁵ Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Helen Hollands August 2020

⁵ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+45%3A+1+-+15&version=NRSV> Accessed 11th August 2020

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Matthew 15:21-28 (NRSV)⁶ The Canaanite Woman’s Faith

21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 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.” 23 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.” 24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26 He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 27 She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28 Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Reflection: ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ Revd Helen Hollands

If you have them, I wonder what you would do for your children? More broadly, what would you do for your family, your siblings, parents and those close to you? In fact, what does family mean?

Both these passages dwell on questions about who is in the family, who is in the protected group, who is inside and who is outside. Each push boundaries, after all, each family has a story, each family has a set of values, we tend to know who is like us, who is not. Sometimes families are extended, or blended, sometimes they are fractured and broken, there may be resentment. Hopefully there is also joy and hope, always hope. But each family has a story, a history, each family has its own way of describing itself.

⁶ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2015:21-28&version=NRSV> Accessed 11th August 2020

Families can be tough and the families described in the passages we heard are no exception.

Consider Joseph, his is a particular history with quite a breakdown in family relationships. There is much to be forgiven, his years in slavery, his loneliness, his time in prison. Although it has worked out for Joseph we may not have been surprised had he borne a grudge, even a serious grudge against his brothers.

Many of us know this story so well, many of us can sing to it, and here, at the heart of the story is the work of God in Joseph. Yes, he plays a game with his brothers but in the end, he reveals himself, he longs to be restored to relationship with his father and with them. This is no mean feat on his part, but he does it through faith, through courage and through forgiveness. To forgive is to forego the grudge for Joseph.

Joseph's story is also God's story, God who restores, God who finds a way through the darkest times and lets the light in. God who enables reconciliation and hope. God who is then able to provide through Joseph food to feed a people through a time of famine and drought. This is a story of hope, a story of a broken and healed family.

Then we heard a second story, this time of a woman who pleads with Jesus on behalf of her daughter. This too is a story of family, on several levels.

The first family is that of the woman herself and her daughter, we can relate to her, who wouldn't plead for their sick child?

But the second family is the wider family that Jesus belongs to, that of the Jewish people. The story comes within a sequence in which Jesus has been arguing with the Pharisees about the nature of that family. How should the law be interpreted and what is the role of Jesus within it. In a real sense this is an internal argument between family members. Then along comes the Canaanite woman, who with audacity and great bravery challenges Jesus. At that time, she would have been regarded with fear, mistrust and as an outsider. Yet she claims otherwise and she is not to be described as a dog but she is dogged. She questions Jesus, after all, even the dogs pick up the crumbs under the table. Jesus seems humbled, he does differently, this is a moment of expansiveness, change, he breaks down the family barriers and the woman's daughter is healed for her great faith.

Both these stories are about family, about relationships, about forgiveness and barriers that are overcome. Both illustrate the work of God who is tireless, who sees beyond our differences to draw in all people. So how do they sit with us?

Family is more than the biological relationships that we share with our children and immediate loved ones however precious they are.

Family goes beyond and we are all challenged to question our own boundaries and limitations. This seems as relevant as ever today, in the context of Black Lives Matter, of our immigration policies, of migrants in barely seaworthy vessels struggling to reach the Kent coast, of social and cultural differences. We might wonder just how welcoming we are. After all, inclusion goes hand in hand with justice. Welcoming others to the family will always require us to change and adapt personally, as church communities and as a society.

For example, in our services, can we accept those who constantly check their phones or those who are often late? Those who dance and move whilst they sing or those who are quieter than us? Those who are fundamentally not what we expect at all?

The story of the gospel is that it always goes beyond what we think or expect, from Judea to Samaria, from Jerusalem to the UK, from worship on a platform like Zoom to the edges of the internet. This is God's family and all are welcome.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession⁷

You may like to use the Taizé refrain between sections:

"The Kingdom of God is justice and peace

And joy in the Holy Spirit

Come, Lord and open in us the gates of your Kingdom"

Please add in your own prayers to reflect the concerns of the day.

God of Love

how wonderful it is for us all to know that God loves us,
no matter our background.

Thank You that in the Kingdom of God
we find radical welcome and inclusion for all,
even ourselves.

We delight in our Father's love.

In Your Kingdom there will be justice and peace,

but we know that this is not the experience of everyone today. Bring Your Kingdom Lord.

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace...

God of Justice

we pray for people who find themselves caught up in conflict. For those navigating difficult
relationship

and making hard decisions.

For those who have experienced discrimination and unfairness. For those caught up in
dangerous situations around the world. We pray for people who find themselves on the
margins.

For those who feel they don't quite fit in or are being left out.

For those who don't want others to know they are struggling.

For those who can't access the things we take for granted because of poverty or disability.

Break down the barriers.

Bring Your Kingdom Lord.

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace...

God of Peace

we pray for Your church.

For our circuits and the communities who gather in worship

⁷ https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/68529/16-August-11-Sunday-after-Pentecost.pdf Accessed 11th August 2020

For our brothers and sisters around the world.
Strengthen and encourage us Lord.
As we settle into new rhythms of life,
we remember those who have suffered
and are struggling with the effects of the last few months.
We pray for those who are trying to return to a new normality and for those who
are caught between the two.
Bring Your Kingdom Lord.
The Kingdom of God is justice and peace...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn⁸

- 1 God! When human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.
- 2 Through that stillness, with your Spirit
come into our world of stress,
for the sake of Christ forgiving
all the failures we confess.
- 3 You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.
- 4 Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life.
Use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.
- 5 Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God! Encourage and renew!

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

⁸ Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 649
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A blessing⁹

Bless to us, O God, the road that is before us,
Bless to us, O God, the friends who are around us,
Bless to us, O God, your love which is within us.
Bless to us, O God, the light that leads us home. Amen

Ruth Burgess

Acknowledgments:

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⁹ Ruth Burgess, *The Book of a Thousand Prayers*, compiled by Angela Ashwin, Zondervan2002, pg. 294