

Sunday 16th August 2020 – Alan Darlington

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

“Be Still and Know that I am God.”

Sit back. Breathe deeply. Quieten yourself and listen to the noises around you; birds outside, the fridge humming, cars passing by, the neighbour working outside. Offer these things to God in thanks.

Father, I thank you for all there is in our world, natural and man made. As I come into your presence, I celebrate them and praise you for them. Speak to me through all those things and through your Word today. Amen.

Hymn: And Can it Be (Singing the Faith 345, H&P 216, MP 33)

Let us pray together

Lord, I come before you and acknowledge that you are King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I bow before you and recognise you as the one who is able to do great things.

Help me to trust you and listen to your reply as I call out to you.

Today's Gospel Reading: 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.

Time to Reflect

The Gospel reading raises a multitude of questions and this reflection is not necessarily able to answer them. Why did Jesus seem to reject the woman – surely his message is for all the world? Why were his disciples apparently so heartless? Why did Jesus heal some people and not others? We say that God always answers our prayers but why are some prayers for healing answered with a 'no'? That last one is surely more pertinent now than ever.

I admit that I don't know the answer to those. However, the reaction of the woman shows us ways that we can

respond when faced with hard questions and difficult situations.

Firstly, in the midst of her trouble and desperation, she recognised who Jesus was and that she should turn to him. She recognised him as someone special, as the one with the power to help her.

Secondly, she reacted with boldness. She was not put off by approaching a stranger, by approaching a man or by approaching a foreigner – none of which would have been easy for a woman of her time to do. Her boldness continued as she pressed the matter and argued her case. She was not put off by Jesus's silence or the disciples' irritation.

Finally, she approached with faith – and that is her claim to fame. She argued her case. Her boldness and her faith go hand-in-hand. Her request was not a “well, Lord, if you might, possibly ...” She trusted that Jesus was the one to help her and wouldn't take no for an answer.

Are we like that woman? When we approach Jesus, do we truly recognise who he is – the Lord of Lords but the Saviour who can meet our deepest needs?

Do we approach with faith, clearly asking, or do we provide God with get-out clauses: “Please heal my friend – or at least make him not quite as bad?”

Do we approach with boldness?

And, when we don't get the answer we want, does our faith allow us to answer back? God's back is strong enough to take it if we shout and rail back at him – as

long as our faith then allows us to respond to his answer.

A time of prayer

Re-read the last verse of the hymn. Take a time to sit quietly

“Bold I approach the eternal throne ...”

I approach your throne for the people I know personally that need a special touch from you. I picture them as I place them into your loving hands.

I approach your throne for the people who are shouting out with questions and despair and don't know where to turn. Be their comfort Lord.

I approach your throne for those far from me and give to you their needs, knowing that I can trust you to respond.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Faithful One (Singing the Faith 628, MP 825)

A prayer of blessing

In the joys, may I celebrate with you Lord.

In the troubles, may I shout out to you with boldness and listen to you in faith.

And in the everyday, may I journey on with you.

Original Materials by Alan Darlington