



**DURHAM
CATHEDRAL**

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

Praying Together

during the week beginning Sunday 16 August

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

During this time of great anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed with everyone who is associated with the Cathedral family. We are delighted that we have been able to reintroduce congregational worship here at the Cathedral and there is more information about that later on in this booklet. Durham Cathedral is also open for private prayer and quiet reflection.

If you'd like to come to the cathedral for worship and/or prayer, there are some important measures we'd like you to know about, to ensure the safety of members of the public and staff. You can find this information on our website: www.durhamcathedral.co.uk We will continue to live stream services as well so that, if you can't re-join us yet, you will still be able to engage with us online.

Gospel

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.

Thought for the Day

by the Reverend Canon Professor Simon Oliver

Romans 11. 1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15. 21-28

Human beings have a habit of dividing themselves into different groups, whether they be cultures, tribes, races, regions, nations, religious groups or football clubs. These act as markers of identity. We like them because they give us a sense of belonging. Many identity markers are part of what it means to be a particular kind of person. For example, I'm a Christian, a white British male, born in Nottingham, a fan of Nottingham Forest, a Professor at Durham University and Canon of Durham Cathedral. These are all identity markers which distinguish me from others – I'm Christian rather than Hindu, male rather than female, European rather than African or Asian, from Nottingham not Derby. None of those differences necessarily entail opposition. I'm Christian, but have countless friends, colleagues, and students of other religions with whom life is richly shared. I'm male and married to a woman. I'm white and live in a multi-ethnic country, albeit one that struggles with the scourge of racism and prejudice of many kinds. Our identity markers, the groups to which we belong, can become sources of division, suspicion, oppression, and self-interest. Divisions of race and gender are the most obvious recent examples, hence 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too'. Nationalisms are another example – nations who pit themselves competitively and violently against others. So too religions and cultures. Identity markers, rather than being part of the rich and colourful diversity of God's creation and the source of its beauty and unity, become the means of its division and destruction. From our own particular identity – our race, culture, creed, social class – we can identify 'others', those who apparently do not belong with us, and treat them with suspicion and derision simply because they are different. Identity markers become the focus of identity politics. This morning, I'd like to talk about identity markers and the way in which Christ overcomes the divisions they can cause. I'd also like to talk about the ways in which the coronavirus threatens to exacerbate the fractures in the human community caused by different identities and traditions, and the vocation of the Church in healing those fractures.

But let's begin with our two scripture readings because they both concern a key identity marker - Jews and Gentiles. Both passages are about a question that lies at the heart of the New Testament. If God had chosen one particular people, Israel, descended from Abraham and blessed from ancient days, was that blessing, now offered in Jesus Christ, still confined to Israel? Did it now include Gentiles, those people who are not Jewish? St. Paul himself was a devout Israelite and a persecutor of Christians before his conversion. His particular identity marker – being Jewish - had become a source of violence against others. He was converted to become a follower of Jesus, the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth, crucified and risen. But it seemed to Paul that Jesus did not come as the Messiah only for God's ancient people the Jews, but for the whole world. Jesus Christ came for Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, male and female, for in Christ all are one. So writes Paul in his letter to the church in Galatia. Christ is universal, gathering the rich diversity of the human community into his body, the Church. As I've said many times in sermons in the cathedral, this is the utterly radical idea at the heart of

the Christian gospel which we so often take for granted: Christ came for every single person – you and me – and for the whole world, not for a particular racial, ethnic, geographic, social, political or cultural group. Christ came for everyone, not one particular identity marker. That's the very ground of our belief in the utter dignity, infinite value, and equality of every single human person. There is no one for whom Christ did not die.

This much that I could say about this in relation to our first reading, but I need to be brief because we're sat uncomfortably in face masks. I'll focus on the gospel. Jesus encounters a Gentile woman, a Canaanite, that cultural and broad ethnic group which were conquered by the Israelites when they took the Promised Land. She comes to Christ with a basic human plea for mercy: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." She acknowledges that Jesus is Jewish, descended from the house of King David, but reaches out to him at a basic human level. Jesus eventually answers, implying that she was nothing to do with him: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Is his mission exclusively Jewish, and not to the Gentiles? Then comes the deepest plea. The woman simply kneels before Jesus, acknowledging that he is her Lord also. "Lord, help me", she says. There's no more basic prayer. There is no more human prayer. "Lord, help me." Jesus' response has troubled Christians throughout the tradition, for it is extremely derogatory: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Is this woman a Gentile 'dog'? Her response is quick, and points to God's blessing extending beyond Israel to the world: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She's asking for crumbs. Then comes the moment of Christ's deepest teaching and the basis of Christian hope for everyone: "'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly." Faith is found beyond Israel, in this Canaanite woman. In the healing of the woman's daughter, we find the healing of the division between Jew and Gentile, the reconciliation of these identities, and the root of Christ's mission to Israel and the whole world.

Over the last three or four years, we've seen growing concern that the society in which we live has become fractured in deep and troubling ways. The identity markers have become markers of division – Brexit and Remain, north and south, metropolitan elites and the former industrial cities, black and white, male, female, and transgender, and so on. The coronavirus has, if anything, exacerbated our division because our experience of the last few months has been extremely varied. For some covid-19 is an immediate threat and has required shielding. This includes certain ethnic and socio-economic groups. For others, the threat is minimal. Thousands have lost their jobs and the divisions between rich and poor will grow in the coming months because of the economic downturn, both nationally and globally. Meanwhile, the search for a vaccine is extremely urgent, but even this is tending to exacerbate divisions along nationalist identities. We have 'vaccine nationalism' where countries are racing to find an effective vaccine and buy up all available stocks for their own populations. Those involved in trying to find a vaccine are pleading with governments to make this a global enterprise because the virus doesn't respect national borders. I'm afraid not even Brexit will keep out covid-19!

Disease divides and a global pandemic, which generates such fear for health and livelihood, plays on our identity markers and turns them into markers which separate and divide. The Church's ministry of reconciliation and healing, its witness to the universal saving love of God in Jesus Christ, becomes particularly important in these moments of division and crisis. In Christ, we are one. For us, sitting apart with our faces covered, this fracturing and separation is vivid this morning, isn't it? Yet we will share the Eucharist, the true sign of our unity as the body of Christ. In the midst of these troubles, look for signs of the healing of human communities. Pray for God's healing and gathering of the nations. Support with your charity every effort to help those most acutely affected by the pandemic. Perhaps most of all, kneel with the Canaanite woman who knelt as an outsider before Jesus and prayed the most basic and visceral of human prayers: "Lord, help us."

A Form of Intercession

Let us pray to the Lord, who has conquered death.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, bread from heaven,
you satisfy the hungry with good things:
grant us a share with all the faithful departed
in the banquet of your kingdom.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, the light of the world,
you gave the man born blind the gift of sight:
open the eye of faith
and bring us from darkness
to your eternal light and glory.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, Son of the living God,
you summoned your friend Lazarus from death to life:
raise us at the last to full and eternal life with you.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, crucified Saviour,
in your dying you entrusted each to the other,
Mary your mother and John your beloved disciple:
sustain and comfort all who mourn.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, our way and truth and life,
you drew your disciple Thomas from doubt to faith:
reveal the resurrection faith to the doubting and the lost.

Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

May God in his infinite love and mercy
bring the whole Church,
living and departed in the Lord Jesus,
to a joyful resurrection
and the fulfilment of his eternal kingdom.
Amen.

Calendar of Holy Days

Thursday 20 August Bernard, abbot, teacher of the faith, 1153
William and Catherine Booth,
founders of the Salvation Army, 1912, 1890

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Hymn

Songs of thankfulness and praise,
Jesu, Lord, to thee we raise,
Manifested by the star
To the sages from afar;
Branch of royal David's stem
In thy birth at Bethlehem;
Anthems be to thee address,
God in Man made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream,
Prophet, Priest, and King supreme;
And at Cana wedding-guest
In thy Godhead manifest;
Manifest in power divine,
Changing water into wine;
Anthems be to thee address,
God in Man made manifest.

Manifest in making whole
Palsied limbs and fainting soul;
Manifest in valiant fight,
Quelling all the devil's might;
Manifest in gracious will,
Ever bringing good from ill;
Anthems be to thee address,
God in Man made manifest

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord,
Mirrored in thy holy word;
May we imitate thee now,
And be pure, as pure art thou;
That we like to thee may be
At thy great Epiphany,
And may praise thee, ever blest,
God in Man made manifest.

Christopher Wordsworth

Poem: The Airy Christ by Stevie Smith (1902-1971)

Stevie Smith's first volume of poetry, the self-illustrated *A Good Time Was Had By All*, was published in 1937 and established her as a poet. Soon her poems were found in periodicals. Her style was often very dark; her characters were perpetually saying 'goodbye' to their friends or welcoming death. At the same time her work has an eerie levity and can be very funny though it is neither light nor whimsical. She was never sentimental, undercutting any pathetic effects with the ruthless honesty of her humour

Who is this that comes in splendour, coming from the blazing East?
This is he we had not thought of, this is he the airy Christ.

Airy, in an airy manner, in an airy parkland walking,
Others take him by the hand, lead him, do the talking.

But the Form, the airy One, frowned an airy frown,
What they say he knows must be, but he looks aloofly down,

Looks aloofly at his feet, looks aloofly at his hands,
Knows they must, as prophets say, nailed be to wooden bands.

As he knows the words he sings, that he sings so happily
Must be changed to working laws, yet sings he ceaselessly.

Those who truly hear the voice, the words, the happy song,
Never shall need working laws to keep from doing wrong.

Deaf men will pretend sometimes they hear the song, the words,
And make excuse to sin extremely; this will be absurd.

Heed it not. Whatever foolish men may do the song is cried
For those who hear, and the sweet singer does not care that he was crucified.

For he does not wish that men should love him more than anything
Because he died; he only wishes they would hear him sing.

A Prayer for use during the Coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for the Church

Every history of ours, O Lord, is the history of all.
For no church is an island, entire to itself.
For the fire of thy servants in far centuries,
thy name be praised, O Lord;
for ancient stones and liturgies,
for ripened learning
and long disciplines of prayer and peace,
thy name be blessed, O Lord;
and every saint, O lord,
preserve, renew, and multiply,
in the eternal Christ.
Amen.

The next issue of *Praying Together*
will be published on Monday 24 August