**Worship sheet for Sunday 5th September 2021**

**Compiled by Mrs Barbara Spencer**

**Preparation**: Let us quieten our minds as we prepare to reflect on God’s word. A focus may help.

Lord, we come as we are, trying to understand your teaching and how it fits in with our perceptions of life in our world. Enable us to appreciate your love and perspective.

**Hymn:** 372 StF:Come down, O Love divine<https://youtu.be/6HPKL1wOVXk>

Prayers: Loving God, Heavenly Father, we praise and adore you. We give you thanks for all your creation and that there are no limits to your love. We are amazed at how you have made provision for us as we continue to learn more about your world. We marvel that everything fits together and each of us has a part to play. We are sorry for the times when we have made decisions which diminish you and all that you have provided. We are sorry, too, when we have not valued other people but have been mislead by status or money and have excluded people because they do not fit in with our ideas. Forgive us Lord when we make judgements which are detrimental to people and your gifts of creation. Help us to see the world with your vision so that we may be better stewards and disciples for you. Most of all we thank you for your unconditional love expressed in the life, teaching, and sacrifice of Jesus. Help us to be energised by your love and resurrection light and so share that love with those around us … In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Readings: Mark 7: 24 – 37; and James 2: 1 – 17

The story of the Syrophoenician woman is a bit difficult to understand at first sight. Jesus had “escaped” to Gentile country; it is not clear whether he was with his disciples. If you have a map of Palestine in the time of Jesus it is worth looking at it as you read the passage. Tyre was not well-regarded by the Jews. This fact suggests that Jesus was not bothered by borders of race, geography, nor religion. Jesus was having a meal in a house, presumably belonging to someone he knew. He was relaxing and trying to avoid being seen by others. Some of you will understand that there is a need to take time out occasionally. However, it was most unusual for Jesus. He was always responsive to need except, seemingly, this time. The woman was Greek, but she had heard of Jesus and his miracles. She was desperate. Her daughter was very ill. The woman believed Jesus could help and found him. She broke convention as a woman asking a strange man to help, a Jew at that, and at a mealtime. She begged Jesus – can you imagine how she must have felt? He responded by likening the Jews to children who should be fed before pet dogs, Gentiles. She understood the reference and found the right answer, even calling Jesus Lord! Her appreciation of Jesus put the Scribes and Pharisees to shame. Jesus agreed with her and promised that her daughter was cured – but he didn’t go to see her. His word was enough. She went home and her faith in Jesus was not disappointed. The story is not only about the value that words can have but also that boundaries in God’s kingdom are porous. Jesus always intended that the Gentiles should be shown God’s blessings but needed to concentrate on the chosen people of Israel, the Jews, first. The woman persuaded him that her needs were as great, regardless of her race, and Jesus responded. There are divisions causing distress today. Some are from tradition or fear. Perhaps you would like to think of some now and reflect upon them.

The following YouTube is a version of the creed. It also encompasses some of John Wesley’s teaching and of all the world being his parish i.e., no borders, however determined, because Jesus did not have any.

“A Creed with No Borders”: <https://youtu.be/KSPhQCB4Tnc>

Hymn: 343 StF: All my days <https://youtu.be/YccZWGt8so0>

Jesus went a long way round after his encounter with the woman, first north and then southeast to the Decapolis. This latter region contained ten cities established by Greeks and loathed by the Jews. There were often skirmishes. Jesus was in Gentile country again! Many deaf people do not speak clearly because they have not heard speech, or they do not hear their own properly. This was so for the deaf man in the story. The healing tradition was by the laying on of hands. This Jesus did but it was when he spoke the word “Ephphatha”, “Be opened” that the healing took place. Immediately he was able to hear and speak clearly. The disciples, and others, were similarly afflicted spiritually. They had not heard clearly what Jesus taught and so did not understand. Consequently, they were unable to convey his teaching. They needed Jesus to enable them by his touch too. How does this relate to us? Do we hear God’s word clearly? Do we understand what Jesus taught about our relationship with God and other people? Do we create barriers or borders because of prejudice, fixed ideas, worldly values etc? Do we have the faith and confidence of the Greek woman to persist in prayer and break down such divisions? The reading from James elaborates this.

I sometimes think that the human race has not learnt much about relationships in the past 2000 or so years. The passage from James could have been written today! Homage is still paid to the rich and famous, with young people trying to emulate them. It is probably worse now that we have television and social media platforms. The problem is not what has been achieved but the attitude of others towards it, and the detriment of the less able or poor. The in-crowd is created at the expense of the outsiders. James says it is no good having fine words without putting them into action. During the pandemic, it was recognised that some wealth could be utilised to benefit the needy and there were many charitable challenges. We also recognised the people who were not famous but were essential for our well-being. We clapped NHS workers, and thanked delivery drivers and supermarket workers and so on. Many began to appreciate what was truly valuable, not just of the superficial kind. “Love your neighbour as yourself” became evident and it continues to help us through this difficult period. Many barriers were broken as people recognised that the Covid 19 virus had no favourites. Unfortunately, there are still some divisions, and some are new.

We are being challenged by many situations – immigration, refugees, by people of other faiths or none, of climate change, international squabbles and of other countries flexing their muscles, of poverty in our country and elsewhere, mental health problems, unhappy families, to name but a few.

Some of these are made worse by being blinkered to the situations. We all make judgements all the time. Sometimes these are well-founded and are ways of keeping us safe, at other times they are not. How often is someone put into a mental box on the first encounter only for them not to fit? Jesus recognised no boundaries, he responded to Jew and Gentile alike. His love is for all, regardless of any conditions imposed by humans. James exhorts us to be like him, difficult though it may be at times. The wonderful thing is, though, that we are not expected to be perfect. Jesus accepts us as we are. We must do the same for others. Let us hear his word and express it clearly in the way we live and speak, and care.

Hymn: 693 StF Beauty for brokenness <https://youtu.be/ZqDOXfj9W0w>

Prayers for others: Loving Lord help us to keep our ears open for your words, to hear the pleas of those in need and to respond as best we can by word and deed. Enable us to be alongside those in need of support

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, those who have remained in the country and feel threatened, and those who are settling in new places, and for the anxious friends and relatives. We ask that justice and peace will prevail and their needs met. We pray for the military staff who have been involved and are suffering physically and mentally. Help them to know your peace and reassuring love.

We pray for Christians under duress because of their faith…

We remember those who are marginalised or are excluded because of some imagined barrier or of status

We hear so many stories of people who are not coping because of lack of food, clean water, poor education, inadequate living accommodation, disease and disability, poor relationships, especially during the pandemic… We pray that they will find the resources they need.

We pray for those suffering as a result of natural disasters – in Southern America and elsewhere…

We pray for ourselves and those we love that we may be strengthened by your love to be your people.

Hymn: 558 StF Lord, you have come to the seashore <https://youtu.be/PXHc_R7ZCGs>

Benediction: 448 StF … Let us be open, welcoming and inclusive in the name of Jesus, our Saviour. Amen