

**Worship Material**  
**Speaking up.**  
**Materials from Roots Bible Study**  
**Sunday 20th August**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

As we gather before you today, Lord God,  
we remember that you are God of all;  
so, we pray for wisdom and sensitivity  
in hearing the voices of those on the margins of our experience.  
Lead us to hear with your ears and to follow your example,  
As we seek to meet needs and foster harmony in your world.  
**Amen.**

**Read Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28**

**Bible notes**

Uncleanness cuts people off from God. As the poles of a magnet repel one another, so God's purity is repelled by uncleanness. That image lies at the heart of the Pharisees' concern with uncleanness, which provides the context for today's reading.

The chapter begins with an argument about washing hands before eating that revolves round the potential for uncleanness, not modern thinking about hygiene. Jesus discusses this with his disciples at verses 10-20. As elsewhere in this Gospel (e.g. 5:21-22), he relocates concern for purity from outside to inside the person. It is evil thoughts, leading to evil actions, that corrupt someone. The story that follows (cf. Mark 7:24-30) could be seen as an 'enacted parable' revealing the truth of Jesus' teaching through an opposite example. The setting is north of Israel, in the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon. Matthew identifies the woman as a Canaanite, a group that was a traditional enemy of Israel (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:1). For that reason and because of her gender, observant Jews would have seen her as likely to be unclean.

From running after Jesus and the disciples (v.23), she then kneels in front of him, physically obstructing him (v.25). The disciples, and even Jesus himself, regard her as a nuisance. Yet the words that come from her lips reveal the purity of her heart. She addresses Jesus like a disciple, calling him 'Lord' three times, and using words similar to Peter's call for help (v.25, cf. 14:30). She is quick to challenge his rejection, perhaps reminding Jesus of God's promise to Abram that 'through you, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:3). Jesus addresses her respectfully (v.28) and heals her daughter. Has he just recognised the truth of what he said earlier? If impure thoughts lead to impure words, then words can also reveal purity of heart – and so the woman receives God's inclusive blessing.

### **A prayer of thanksgiving**

Almighty God, from ancient times you have reminded your people to listen to the cries of those excluded or marginalised; and through Jesus you have expanded your people Israel to include us, with an invitation to all the world.

Thank you for your generous and caring nature. Help us to mirror it in our lives and actions, as we hear with your ears, see with your eyes, and love with your heart.

We praise you for your arms outstretched to save the lost, to include the excluded, to raise those the world despises. You are God of the outcast and stranger, welcoming all, making friends of foes.

**Amen.**

### **A prayer to conclude**

O God, you open your arms wide to all of us.

Help us trust that you really do love us,  
the real deep-down us, warts and all.

Nothing we can do can stop you loving us.

If, like the Canaanite woman, we dare to believe,  
may your healing love flow through us to the hurting,  
so we may hear singing in heaven!

**Amen.**