

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 8 September 2024 - The Fifteenth Sunday of Trinity and Education Sunday and
Accession of King Charles III

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Proverbs 22 v1, 2, 8, 9, 22, 23; Psalm 125; James 2. 1-10 (11-13) 14-17; Mark 7. 24-37

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Steven Rothwell, Curate Training Officer and Training Incumbent

In Biblical times, referring to Gentiles as "dogs" was a form of abuse. Today we would call it racism. There are commentaries on this Gospel passage that suggest that Jesus was being playful; the word for dog is said to be diminutive i.e., "puppy." Others suggest Jesus was testing the woman's faith. Or perhaps he was just using a figure of speech, these interpretations suggest a need to explain away the insult so that we don't have to deal with Jesus making a racist comment.

We might encounter different forms of racism. Some people are hard core racist. No matter what is said or done, they will perceive all people who are of a different skin colour or cultural heritage as being an inconvenience. This kind of hard-core racism is a devaluing of people, based on race, geography, clothing, or gender etc, and we might name it as a sin. This type of racism does not want to abandon its preconceived notions.

There is also an "I'm not racist, but..." kind of racism. Here sit people of goodwill, who are perhaps lacking in self-awareness. They are aware of the evil inherent in racist attitudes and have abandoned them. But are not quite ready to abandon certain pre-judgments about another group. A benevolent paternalism is often present. In other cases, particular failings are identified with a racial group, as though the perceived correlation between the two was actually caused by, or inherent in, that group. Currently there may be some who regard the violent situations in areas of the world that aren't where we live as being inherent within aspects of that culture itself. In making this judgment we seem completely unaware of the fragility of our own civility, such as it is, and conveniently ignore the evidence of acts of violence in our own society.

There is also an unconscious racism of ignorance and circumstance, which may be a hangover of an earlier caution of those from "outside the tribe." In other words, you can only trust the people you know, but I wonder where that philosophy eventually ends?

Mark's Gospel speaks into the issue of racism and difference. In Chapter 6, we see the feeding of the five thousand, used by Mark to tell us Jesus has come for all the Jewish people of God. In Chapter 8, *the same story* is re-shaped to tell us Jesus has come for all the Gentile people of God. Jesus is for everyone.

We can read Chapter 7 as preparation for Chapter 8. Jewish people are being told, "Here is your Messiah. Now you will need to prepare yourself to discover that he is other people's Messiah, too." The lesson is then to be applied to all interpersonal and race relationships.

Jesus leaves Jewish territory to go to Tyre. He goes against social expectations three times: He heals a Gentile. He heals a female. He heals a child.

When the woman asks him to cast out a demon from her daughter, Jesus responds with a stock reply that was the inherent racism of his day and culture. He calls the woman a "dog" and says God's blessing is not for her.

The woman calls him to account: "But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" (28) This is an extraordinarily powerful response.

The woman does not call him to account by quoting law, or logic. She does not, as we might, call him a racist. She takes his little story; 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' and uses it against him. She embellishes the story. She teases out his own humanity when she talks about the dogs under the table, and the crumbs and the children. He is exposed to a contradiction between his own compassionate self and the attitude of his story.

There is an incidental lesson here. Story, and the meeting of people, are two of the strongest antidotes to our inherent racisms. Hearing a story or encountering a person we can relate to are far more powerful than law and logic. They operate at something of the same visceral level as our race-based fears and prejudices.

Faced with the woman's reply, Jesus immediately *repents*. He turns, changes, immediately taking on board the implication of what she has said. And he heals the child. Learning something of himself, something new, he immediately puts it into action. He is not hard core racist. He is not reluctant to abandon his preconceived notions. Called to account by the woman, he responds immediately.

Note also that Jesus doesn't say anything about the woman's faith being the trigger for the exorcism, which was a common comment of Jesus when he healed people. Rather, it is her argument that he applauds: "because of this word, go". It may be said that this is the only time in scripture that Jesus loses an argument, and he loses it to a 'foreign' woman identified with the enemies of his people.

The story which follows is the final act of Chapter 7. Perhaps *we* are the person who is deaf. *We* have been taken aside by Jesus. 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' *We* are to hear what has just been said to us. When we see the feeding in Chapter 8, we are to hear, as in understand, and "speak plainly." Now we are ready to hear what will be said in Chapter 8: Jesus is for everyone.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

God of justice, we pray for the feeding of the world. Give wisdom to those who make policy about food, to ensure a fair share for all. We pray for plentiful harvests to those who grow crops and raise livestock.

Bountiful God, hear our prayer.

God of justice, we pray for the Church, feeding your people with word and sacraments. Guide and bless our bishops, priests and all ministers as they feed Christ's flock with wise teaching.

May every celebration of the eucharist be a rich banquet of your forgiveness and love. Show us how to work generously and effectively, reaching out in loving service with emergency food relief and community feasts.

Bountiful God, hear our prayer.

God of justice, we pray for our local community. Bless our local markets, food stores, cafes and restaurants. Bless us at the tables we share with family and friends and make us good companions at mealtimes and beyond. Increase in us the spirit of hospitality to strangers. Teach us to live and to eat more simply, so that there may be more to share with the hungry of our neighbourhood.

Bountiful God, hear our prayer.

God of justice, we pray for the poor, the hungry and all prisoners, and for the people we love who need your care today. We name them before you now... Bring healing, peace and

hope to all who suffer. Bring clean water and good food to the poor in every land. Bring spiritual nourishment to all who are hungry for truth.

Bountiful God, **hear our prayer.**

God of justice, we thank you for inviting us in Christ to the feast of the age to come. We thank you for those who have gone before us in faith. Bring us, with all your saints, to rejoice with you for ever.

Bountiful God, **hear our prayer.**

Adapted from *The Anglican Church of Australia* This text may be reproduced for use in worship in the Anglican Church of Australia.

Suggested hymns/songs

In Christ There Is No East or West

Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above

O for a Thousand Tongues

Blessed Assurance

Inspired by love and anger (Iona song, John Bell)

Heaven shall not wait (Iona song, John Bell / Graham Maule)

A song suitable for children: Jesus' hands are Healing Hands (Trish and Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan).

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/> (weekly@lectionary resource)