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**Sunday 20th August 2023**

**Proper 15 / Ordinary 20**

**The Revd Lucy Brierley**

**Call to Worship**

People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God *(Luke 13 v29)* **Praise the Lord**

Every tribe and language and people and nation *(Revelation 5 v9)* **Praise the Lord**

Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? *(Psalm 139 v7)* **Praise the Lord**

Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you….’ (Revelation 15 v4) **Praise the Lord**

**Prayer of Approach**

God, your presence lifts us, Your grace amazes us,

Your power overwhelms us, Your love excites us.

We come to worship, expecting to hear your voice.

God, your people encourage us, Your church feeds us,

Your worldwide family holds us, Your kingdom beckons us,

We come to worship, expecting to hear your voice.

Draw us close to you, as you draw close to us,

Speak clearly into our hearts, speak deeply into our lives,

speak wisdom into your church

Give us ears to listen - to you, and to you in each other

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Prayer of Confession

We are one people, You are one God.

You call each of us by name,

we learn more of you and understand more deeply who you are

when we hear your story -

from another place,

from another voice,

from another heart.

God, when we behave as though our way is best. Forgive us.

When we claim you are at work in each one,

but behave as though You can only be worshipped with *our* songs,

You can only be glorified in *our* liturgy,

You can only be encountered in *our* culture. Forgive us.

For narrowing the truth of your kingdom,

for hiding from the vision that you gave -

that all shall be included in the feast of life.

Move us from complacency, apathy and indifference,

to see the truth that in you we are one – yes – but that you made us different,

you made us unique and you come to us uniquely.

Open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, our homes, our tables, our churches,

that we might encounter you in each other,

in our treasured sisters and brothers,

each showing us your image,

until the day, when we sit at the table in the kingdom of heaven together.

Thanks be to God.

To all who repent, Jesus says, ‘your sins are forgiven, now come, and follow me’. Thanks be to God, Amen

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Readings**

*Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8 | St Matthew 15: 21-28*

All Age Intro/Activity

Aim: To demonstrate how Jesus changed the norms of society and made a way for everyone to be welcomed, wanted and accepted.

Activity: Set up a rectangular table with places set and chairs around it. Invite someone to play the part of the host and sit at the head of the table. Explain they are the most important person and can invite guests to their table. The most important guests will sit closest to them and the less important ones sit further away. Have some fun arranging people around the table and labour the point that position means everything!

Now bring someone else up to beside the table but explain that unfortunately they don’t belong in this dinner party and can’t have a seat. Ask them how this makes them feel and draw out the sense of exclusion.

Now ask everyone to stand up and switch the table for a round one (if this isn’t practical then just ask them to stand in a circle). Explain that through Jesus’ life and teaching he showed that everyone is welcome in the family of God and that we are all of equal worth – there are no special seats at the table! Make a point of drawing in the person who was originally excluded and giving them an equal place.

Explain that in the Kingdom of God, which Jesus came to announce the arrival of, everyone is invited. God’s plan, which Jesus came to fulfil, is to invite everyone into his family. How good are we at letting people know this, at inviting them and making them feel welcome?

Sermon Notes

This week’s readings are all about the wideness of God’s mercy. Themes of who is in and who is out, redemption and acceptance are all at play.

*Genesis 45 v1-15*

This text is part of the grand finale of Joseph’s story. He has been through a great deal having been rejected by his brothers and sold to foreigners. Now his trials are over and he stands in a position of power over the brothers who had treated him so badly. Joseph could have sought revenge, but instead, he chooses to see where God’s purposes have been at work, to restore the unity of his family, and to help his brothers. He has sensed God’s hand at work in his life. Does he know that he and his family are playing their part in God’s big salvation plan?

*Isaiah 56 v1, 6-8*

Relationships with foreigners were always complex and too often hostile. Into this the prophet Isaiah speaks of God’s attitude and desire, that in addition to the people of Israel, God’s chosen nation, foreigners who love the Lord would be brought ‘to my holy mountain’ and made ‘joyful in my house of prayer’. Here we see a reminder of God’s salvation plan, to draw the whole world back into right relationship with him by calling out Israel to be a light to the nations. The prophet’s words seem to be a reminder to Israel of God’s greater purpose, lest they forget that the reason for their special status is not for their own glorification, but to be a blessing to the world.

How often do we behave as though the church belongs to us, and that things should be done our way? Are we guilty of getting so wrapped up in the doing things the way we like them inside the church, that we forget that we, too, are to be a beacon of light drawing those in our communities who feel on the outside of the church into the loving family of God.

*Matthew 15 v21-28*

This New Testament reading can feel like a tricky one at first sight because it seems as though Jesus is refusing to help someone who is in need because she is of a different race. That really jars with us. The woman was an outsider, a Canaanite. She was not from the people of Israel, God’s chosen people. Yet, by the end of the conversation, Jesus recognises her faith and sees that she understands that salvation for the whole world would come through God’s chosen people, Israel. Jesus had come first to announce the fulfilment of God’s promise to Israel – that he was the Messiah they had been promised.

By the end of this conversation, and at many other places where Jesus encounters foreigners and others on the edge of society, we see how Jesus revealed the full intention of God’s salvation plan. The doors were to be flung open wide and everyone would be welcomed in. This encounter is like a first glimpse of that full purpose being realised and it almost seems as though it takes Jesus himself by surprise!

We are those who have seen the radical, inclusive nature of the Gospel throughout the New Testament, where Paul is bold enough to declare that ‘there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.’

What does this look like in our churches today? Are they truly places of welcome and inclusion or are we too busy keeping things as we would like them to be to risk letting others in?

**Offertory Prayer**

Generous God,

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,

to you we bring these gifts.

Use them, use us, we pray,

in the service of your world

and to the glory of your name. Amen

**Prayers of Intercession**

Almighty God,

Summoning God, ever calling, ever ready to bless,

we thank you that you are without limits.

You break the moulds of the past to teach us something new,

You meet everyone where they live and call us to do the same.

Renew our sense of purpose and commitment to sharing your love.

Teach us to treasure one another, those who are like us and those who are different. Teach us to keep the doors open, the welcome warm and the love unconditional.

As we spend time thinking about the needs of others and our own attitudes we each fall silent before you. We ask that you would not only hear the quiet prayers we each whisper in our hearts, but that you would speak to us and challenge us to show where we could do better in your work of welcoming and caring.

In this time and place you have called us to pray for those in need.

We pray for the people whose names the world knows, whose stories are told daily in the news...

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for people in places of suffering whose names only you and their friends know, and whose lives you cherish.

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the people whose names and lives we know, those who today are in pain or distress or trouble, those who are happy, those who are sad.

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves, God.

You know each of us by name.

Make us into the people you want us to be, and when that hurts,

reassure us how much you love us.

We bring our prayers and ourselves in Jesus’ name. Amen

**Blessing**

Go forth in the name of Jesus, who came among us in vulnerability,

who lived among us in poverty, yet welcomed us in hospitality.
Let us share the riches of his grace with all those we meet.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,

Be upon us in this moment, and in every moment, forevermore Amen

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| **Hymn Suggestions** |
|  | *RS* | *CH4* | *StF* | *MP* |
| Summoned by the God who made us |  |  | 689 |  |
| Hear the Call of the Kingdom |  |  | 407 | 1282 |
| I dream of a church | 583 |  |  |  |
| In Christ there is no East or West | 647 | 624 | 685 | 329 |
| What shall our greeting be? | 38 |  | 691 |  |
| Christ for the world we sing | 599 |  |  |  |
| God is love, let heaven adore him | 95 | 123 | 103 | 187 |
| Come all you Vagabonds | https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/vagabonds/ |
| How Lovely on the Mountains / Our God Reigns |  |  |  | 249 |

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*