



## **Worship at Home service for 24<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

### **Call to worship**

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us <sup>2</sup> so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. <sup>3</sup> May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. <sup>4</sup> May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. <sup>5</sup> May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.

### **StF no. 255 *The Kingdom of God***

**1** The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,  
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

**2** The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share  
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

**3** The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to His cross,  
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

**4** God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer His call,  
and all things cry glory to God all in all!

### **Prayers of adoration, and confession**

Almighty Creator, we cannot comprehend the immensity of the universe or the imagination that devised such variety and detail. We can only bow in awe of your majesty and power. Gracious Father, we cannot understand why you should love us – when you are holy and we so rebellious and sinful. And yet your son Jesus has rescued us from certain death, and your Holy Spirit equips us with the guidance, understanding and courage we need to live faithfully for you.

We seek forgiveness for all the wrong in our lives, and all the good left undone. We ask for help and strength to share the news of your love and mercy with those we live among, so that all people around us might know and praise and worship you. Accept all we can offer in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

You forgive us, Lord, when our hearing is selective, when we choose to whom we shall listen and respond. Thank you for forgiving our selfishness. You forgive us, Lord, when our faith is selective, when we choose the bits that we like and ignore the difficult things. Thank you for forgiving our wilful ignorance. Thank you for being the God of forgiveness, heart ever open to our penitence and the will to do better. **Amen.**

### **Reading: *Matthew: 15: 21 – 28***

<sup>21</sup> Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

<sup>25</sup> The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. <sup>26</sup> He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

## Message

Immediately before his encounter with the woman in Samaria, Jesus had been involved in debates and challenges with church leaders about being ritually clean or unclean. Because they did not, would not, understand what His mission was about, He went to gentile territory, near the notoriously ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Canaanites were descended from inhabitants of Palestine but had parted company back in history, and were regarded as likely to corrupt the Israelites. Jews often called Gentiles 'dogs' and dismissed them as inferior.

Jesus' attitude towards other people was always unconventional! In his stories and in real life he scolded the pious, respectable 'pillars of society' for their arrogance, hypocrisy and spiritual blindness; but singled out for special favour those considered social outcasts. A reversal of normal, and shocking to those around him. His whole life illustrated that God did not intend anyone to be repressed, demeaned or excluded. Jesus lifted a sense of inferiority, isolation, fear or shame from even the least likely characters. He touched the 'untouchable' to heal disease, and called and welcomed sinners (those who could not or would not fulfil the demands of the Law). While the religious authorities demanded respectability, piety and rituals, Jesus showed that God invited humility and devotion from the heart.

His departure from convention included his attitude towards women, who were of little account in society. Jesus treated them with respect and compassion, gave them status; and would even choose women to carry the news of the resurrection. This departure from common expectation was not restricted to people of different status within Jewish society: he developed an 'awful' habit of treating Gentiles (non-Jews) with respect and compassion too, affirming their worth – whoever they were.

None of this should really have surprised or offended his contemporaries - there was no shortage of references in the Old Testament (their scripture) to God's mercy and salvation being for all races. At the very start of his ministry, he had warned that people other than Jews would feature in God's love and receive salvation. This caused uproar, and the crowd tried to destroy him. Yet he was only reminding them of a truth they should have known. His life would simply fulfil prophecy. There was ample evidence that nobody remained outside God's love and forgiveness, and 'whoever' really meant anyone at all.

Against this background, our gospel story poses problems. This mother was a woman and foreign: to Jewish eyes a person of no importance or rights. Surely it was reasonable to request her daughter's healing, but Jesus *appears* churlish, ungracious. We are appalled by discrimination, but it seems that Jesus of all people refused to help just because she was a woman and of the wrong race.

Jesus' challenge tested the grounds on which she claimed his attention and help. She showed humility and recognition of who he was; and she knew her entitlement. Jesus ended up praising her faith, and witnesses received a lesson.

The woman believes that Jesus has the power to heal. "Son of David" was a title for the Messiah that the disciples were only beginning to associate with him. She understands how God's choice of Israel to bear his promises to the world would work out in practice, and uses it to her advantage in bantering with Jesus. She accepts being called a 'dog', and does not claim to be entitled simply to share the food, but to be within her rights by grasping any scraps that the rightful recipients rejected or ignored anyway. In a sense she forced Jesus' hand, but within the general remit of his mission on earth. This notion is not unlike the point of the parable of the Great Feast (Luke 14), where the intended guests reject the privilege of their invitation, so the people from the 'highways and byways' of ordinary life are brought in to enjoy the proffered luxury and abundance in their place.

It is important to see that Jesus' fundamental mission was being defined: he was not a travelling doctor required to heal every sick person he met. He had already hinted at a very specific calling. He had sent his disciples out on mission with strict instructions not to go to Samaria or any gentile town, but to minister to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. God's people needed to know that their God was now fulfilling his promises; the Kingdom they longed for was beginning to appear. His own mission was to fulfil the Law and purpose for which God's people existed. The message of salvation was first for

Israel itself. To lose focus and conduct an indiscriminate mission to the wider world would be to imply that God made a mistake by choosing and declaring Israel as his special people – the ones who would bring the Word and new life to the rest of the world.

Do we ever hold back from claiming love, forgiveness, or any of the blessings God promises, because we have convinced ourselves we are not good enough to merit them? Of course we're not!! But God's grace has never depended on our deserving it: it is not that we are irresistibly loveable, but God is Love, and He loved us first. One worship song says, "Nothing you can do could make him love you more; nothing you have done could make him close the door." Even if we are the targets of hostility and injustice from others; or too consumed with guilt or shame to seek God's presence, and our self-esteem is non-existent; or we have a wealth of excuses about our frailty, inadequacy, lack of skills or understanding or opportunity ... he loves each of us "As if there were no-one else to love" (St. Augustine). He is always waiting to pour his grace into us and transform our lives. Are we missing these blessings?

In all honesty, intentionally or not, do we select which people 'deserve' God's love, and which we need not witness to? In our minds have we classified certain people as not interested in the gospel, without even trying to introduce them to it? Had God's grace not been revealed in his own good time to Gentiles, we could not have known his love or been saved! Like this woman, we too must claim our rightful inheritance from God – all his promises for the present and the future - with a faith that refuses to be put off. Like Jesus, in our living and witnessing, we must cross traditional boundaries of gender, race, culture, religion, health or disability, poverty or affluence ... to bring even (particularly?) those marginalised or considered of little account by society to an understanding of God's love and saving grace.

The very least we can do in thankfulness for the salvation we have received is to follow the example of Jesus and proclaim in words and demonstrate through our living that God is the Father, Creator and Redeemer of us ALL. Who is missing out on his blessing because we will not lead them to him, or plead with him for their healing? **Amen**

### **Prayers of intercession**

Living God, you hold all people within your loving care: no colour, race or gender curbs your graciousness; time does not weary your love; there are no barriers, no boundaries to your kindness; and so we come with gratitude and thankfulness for your universal gifts. When the hungry are fed and the needy clothed; prisoners and patients are visited; strangers are made at home; people with no power or voice are listened to with respect; when other people care about us and for us; when you give us a new chance and a new hope... we thank you because we see your love at work.

Our hearts long for all people to receive the same gifts from your store of grace. We pray for those who still cry out for food and water, clothes, medical aid, education; for peace around and within them, for security and justice; for freedom from guilt, assurance of their worth, a purpose in life, a love for you as you love them.

Father, we pray for any groups that we belong to. We pause to remember for a moment what it feels like to belong. We try to recall what it felt like at first, when we were new, nervous, unsure of ourselves and those in the group. As we recollect those feelings, help us to be people and places of welcome; that all who cross our paths may feel the extent of your love and welcome. Forgive us when we have failed to be welcoming, for whatever reason. Show us how to be those who see others through your eyes. Let there always be love between us and among us, whoever we are with.

Father, we pray for all those in our society who cannot stand up for themselves or feel they do not have a voice. We pray for young children, particularly those in care. We think of those who live on the streets of our cities, or those moved from hotel room to hotel room, never able to get a foot on the

ladder to a home of their own. We pray for those who have found themselves in gangs, thinking they might be a place of safety but only finding them to be a place of fear and hatred. We pray for the elderly, trapped in isolation and loneliness. We think of refugees and all those trapped in a cycle of human exploitation. Father, the list seems endless. We cry out to you for all these people, and more, who may come to mind now in the stillness. Father, show us how and where we can begin to be the answer to some of these really pressing needs.

Especially today we bring to you those known to us who are struggling with illness, disability or the frailty of age; anxiety about tests and results; fear of present circumstances or the future. We remember those who are sick, sorrowful or sad at this time, *especially....*

Help us all to share the joys and the pains of being human by respecting each other and seeing everyone through your eyes. Through all that restricts their lives and destroys their wellbeing, may they never doubt your presence and amazing love for them, but know the peace, strength and hope that your Spirit imparts for their remaining days in this world and for eternity to come. **We ask all these prayers in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

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.**

### **StF no. 443** *Come let us sing of a wonderful love*

**1** Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
Tender and true;  
Out of the heart of the Father above,  
Streaming to me and to you:  
Wonderful love  
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

**2** Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,  
Joyfully came;  
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,  
Sharing their sorrow and shame;  
Seeking the lost,  
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

**3** Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;  
Why do they roam?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget;  
Home, weary wanderer, home!  
Wonderful love  
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

**4** Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,  
Come and abide,  
Lifting my life, till it rises above  
Envy and falsehood and pride;  
Seeking to be  
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

*Charles Wesley*

### **Benediction**

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!

We can know that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is with us, and will remain with us always. **Amen.**

***This worship service has been prepared by Sue Taylor***