

Worship at Home – 18 August 2026

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, prepared by Mary Armstrong.

Introduction: Today we explore the voices of the marginalised or excluded.

Jesus has two tricky encounters in today's Gospel, first with the Pharisees, who aren't happy with what they see as criticism from Jesus, then with a Canaanite woman, seen to be overstepping her position. The two situations seem to be linked by food. In fact, the link is deeper – faith and membership of God's people – and the outcome of these encounters comes as something of a surprise.

This week we explore how Jesus challenges our small notions of who God loves. We are invited to have transformed, loving hearts, both to receive God's love from other people and to channel it to them – speaking up to ensure that all are included. Today we explore the voices of the marginalised or excluded.

Call to worship

We gather here, Lord,
ready to focus totally on you.
Help us to be brave enough, like Peter,
to ask the questions that we would like to ask,
and open enough to hear your answer.
In our worship today, speak to us, Lord.
We are listening.
Amen.

Opening prayers

Lord God, as we come before you now,
we open our hearts to you.
Help us to see that we can learn so much from others,
even from those with whom we think
we may not share much in common.
Make us willing to stand out from the crowd,
to hear your voice, and act upon it.
Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 489¹ *All I once held dear, built my life upon...*

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss ;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.
<i>Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,</i> | <i>there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.</i> |
| 2 | Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith | |

what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

3 Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,

and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number **489**

Words and Music: © 1993, Graham Kendrick / Make Way Music Ltd, PO Box 320, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. TN2 9DE UK.
<www.grahamkendrick.co.uk> Used by permission.

A Prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

Lord, sometimes we look as though we are listening to others.
We may even make all the right noises!
But we confess that our attention is often anywhere but
where it is supposed to be.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we are too distracted by our own concerns, thinking only of our worries,
and listening only to those who say what we want to hear.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we don't listen to people
because we don't like them,
or because they are different from us.
Sometimes we have unkind or unhelpful thoughts.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Sometimes we don't listen to you, Lord,
because we are too busy,
or a bit frightened about what you might say to us.

Forgive us, Lord, for missed opportunities.

Come Prince of peace, come Lord of light, and help us to know ourselves forgiven by your
grace, and our burdens lifted by the knowledge of your unconditional love for us.

Bible reading: Matthew 15:10-20 and 21-28

Clean and Unclean

¹⁰ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

¹³ He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides. ^[a] If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶ “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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.”

²³ 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.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Reflection on the reading

The Gospel writer surely didn’t intend us to have a bad impression of Jesus from reading this story, so what does he intend? The long Gospel reading is needed to get the full sense of the two stories and how they are connected.

The Pharisees are offended by Jesus’ words of criticism, so shocked in fact they that they are unable to hear Jesus’ real message, which is that what God wants means controlling the things you say, and that this is far more important than simply avoiding non-kosher food.

The largely Jewish-Christian audience for whom Matthew writes would appreciate the sharp debate between Jesus and the Canaanite woman – it was fundamental to their religious culture. The woman is commended by Jesus because the depth of her need

overrides any possibility of her taking offence. She is acutely aware that as a non-Jew she may not deserve anything at all, but she isn't going to give up.

This story is told to strengthen our faith and the message is simple. It is this, don't take offence, don't give up if you think you are being ignored, don't give up when others try to put you off, and don't take no for an answer. This woman knows of Jesus' reputation and she knows that he could heal her daughter if only he would.

What seems somewhat racist language (calling the Canaanites 'dogs') is completely turned around. In a society in which women didn't speak to men, a woman is heard. As a result, this foreign woman, who had the temerity to speak to Jesus, has been heard and her prayer answered.

The gospel is for people of all nations and women matter. She has been welcomed, and indeed can share in the heavenly banquet – a point which we can often recall in many English-speaking eucharistic traditions, when we say 'We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.' She is one of us and we are one with her.

How and why do we draw lines about who is in and who is out? People are easily offended and upset about how other people worship and/or behave. Do we ourselves take offence? In many centuries, including our own, there has been a great deal of drawing of lines around who's acceptable among Christian communities and who is not.

Might we see this Gospel story as one that demonstrates that the Messiah has come not just for his own people – and certainly not just for 'people like us' – but for the whole world? Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 416² *There's a wideness in God's mercy...*

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea ;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty. | 4 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind ;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind. |
| 2 There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed ;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head. | 5 But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own ;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own. |
| 3 There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this ;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss. | 6 If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word ;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord. |

Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 416

Prayers for ourselves and for the world.

The Canaanite woman sought your help Lord. She loved her daughter so much, she was so desperately in need, that she wouldn't give up until she had her answer.

Lord, may we learn from this woman, to wait on you expectantly, patiently, persistently. Grant us the courage of our convictions when we truly believe we are doing your will.

We will continue with our prayers by holding three short periods of quiet, in which each of us is invited to bring our own prayers to God.

Firstly, we pray for those closer to home, calling to mind the name or the face of somebody in our own family, or amongst our church congregation or a close friend in need of our prayers. In the quiet, we hold them and their situation up to God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know our hearts and our hurts. We commit them to you now, and invite you to come close to those we have prayed for, bringing them your healing, your comfort, your hope.

Secondly, we pray for situations further afield – taking a moment to pray for something we have heard in the news that troubles us, or for someone we have never met but whose story has affected us. In the quiet, we hold these people and situations up to listening God.

[Silence]

Living God, you know the pains of your world. It can feel like a dark world when we switch on the news, or read our newspapers. In the darkness, bring your light. In the conflict, bring your peace. In the brokenness, bring your healing.

Finally, let's spend a moment praying for the wider Christian church, and for all people of faith. In the quiet, we pray for all who meet in worship today, and remember those unable to worship openly together.

[Silence]

Living God, help us – your people – to be your hands and feet in the world. May we find ways to be an answer to prayer, to bring transformation in our own lives, in our communities and in our world. We bring these, and all our prayers, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen

Lets say together the prayer that Jesus gave us
Let us say **The Lord's Prayer** together.

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your Name
Your kingdom comes
Your will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, Now and for ever.
Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 611³ *Brother, sister, let me serve you...*

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too. | 4 I will weep when you are weeping ;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you ;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through. |
| 2 We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road ;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load. | 5 When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony. |
| 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear ;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear. | 6 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too. |

Richard A. M. Gillard (b. 1953)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number **611**

Words and Music: © 1977 Scripture in Song (a division of Integrity Inc.), Administered by Song Solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square,
Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1QG. <www.songsolutions.org> Used by permission.

Blessing

O Lord, 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,
Lord help us to find you in the people we meet.**Amen**

1. Frederick William Faber (1814-1863).
2. Charles Wesley (1707-1788).
3. Marty Haugen (b. 1950) © 1994 Gia Publications Ltd
4. All prayer material and the reflection © 2002-2026 ROOTS for Churches Ltd
5. Bible Verses from New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblical, Inc.® CCLI Licence number 54165.