

Good morning, and welcome to worship.

Call to worship:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning. New EVERY morning Great is his faithfulness.

We come to worship with praise and thankfulness as we share in the hymn
StF 363 - MY JESUS, MY SAVIOUR,

Lord, there is none like You. All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of Your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship You.

*Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing, Power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of Your name.*

I sing for joy at the work of Your hand, for ever I'll love You, for ever I'll stand.

Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.

(Darlene Zschech b. 1965)

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OPENING PRAYERS

Father God, we are here, separated, but held together in Jesus our Lord to worship and praise you for your great love towards us.....As we worship draw near to us now.

Where we have failed you during this past week we confess our sins to you.

A moment for confession .. We hear the words of Jesus, "Your sins are forgiven".

We come to open our hearts and minds to receive all that you wish to give to us today.

Holy Spirit, infuse our worship as we lift our hearts in thanks and praise to God. Amen

The first Bible reading is from 2 Kings 5:9-14 (NLT)

Beginning with a short introduction

Naaman, a wealthy military man from the country of Aram had leprosy. A young girl who had been captured from Israel and taken away from her parents was the servant of Naaman's wife. The girl suggested that Naaman should go to the prophet Elisha in Israel to be healed. We continue in 2 Kings ch 5 at verse 9.

9" So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. 10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy."

11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me! 12 Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the

Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?
..... So Naaman turned and went away in a rage.

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13 But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir,^[c] if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!'" So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him.

And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!"

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 15:21-28 New Living Translation (NLT)

The Faith of a Gentile Woman

21 "Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Gentile^[a] woman who lived there came to him, pleading, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely."

23 But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to go away," they said. "She is bothering us with all her begging."

24 Then Jesus said to the woman, "I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel." 25 But she came and worshipped him, pleading again, "Lord, help me!"

26 Jesus responded, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."

27 She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table."

28 "Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed."

SERMON

This rather strange gospel story is not easy to understand, for it has a lot to do with the political and the national climate of that day.

Jesus was anxious to spend time alone with his disciples. He knew that his time with them was limited, and he had SO MUCH which he needed to teach them. So, in an attempt to get some privacy, for himself and for them, he travelled with them north, to Tyre and Sidon. This journey took him outside Jewish territory for the first and only time.

You see Jesus could find no peace in Palestine. The crowds pursued Him wherever he went. He felt that, here at least for a short time, he would have time and space with his friends - a getting away from it all for a while - We all know what that feels like, don't we.

So, here was Jesus in Gentile territory but, even here we discover, - a woman comes to him for help. An intrusion, yet again - into his privacy.

The woman calls, and we are told, Jesus didn't answer.

I guess we all know that feeling - Go away - leave me alone - A desperate need for peace!
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But the woman doesn't give up easily - she keeps on calling out.

The disciples are most embarrassed - send her away, they say.

Jesus is in a dilemma. He's come here for a special purpose - to do God's Kingdom business - he needs important time with his disciples, Jesus knows that his ministry MUST BEGIN WITH THE JEWS and yet, here is this "Gentile dog" as the Jews called them, desperate for help.

What is Jesus to do.

Compassion wins; and at last Jesus turns to her.

I am sure there was a twinkle in his eye as he said to her

"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs" She sees his sparkle and responds "True, she says, but even the dogs get a share of the crumbs which fall from their master's table".

Yes. His ministry might be for the Children of Israel, but even Gentile "dogs" may be permitted to take what the Jews refuse.

Jesus was thrilled at her reply: - amazed at her keen observation, and delighted with her persistent faith.

In response, he granted her the blessing she so desired and her daughter was healed.

This is the kind of faith that THRILLS Jesus - the faith that never gives up, but KEEPS ON asking; the faith that doesn't take NO for an answer but goes on believing and trusting.

This is the kind of faith that brings results.

This morning, we have shared in two different situations where God's help was sought, in various needy and difficult circumstances.

And in each one, God responded with his healing and his love.

Like the woman, Naaman was also a foreigner, and yet he too sought healing from Israel's God. As we have heard, Naaman was the commander of the Kings army - a very proud man; a very important man who was respected by all who worked for him.

Even his wife's servant girl seemed to be saddened by his illness and longed for him to get better.

Perhaps this is a strange reaction from her; since she had been kidnapped by Naaman's soldiers and taken from her home to live and serve in his household.

Yet this young girl had learned to love; she had learned to forgive; to care; and then to tell of one she knew, who could heal her master.

Isn't it amazing to know that this young girl - so insignificant - just one of the servants, - was willing to speak out, and was used by God, in Naaman's healing.

I find it so encouraging to see that God uses very ordinary humble people, to do his work, when they are willing to do what he asks of them.

God is in the business of healing, and he used a servant girl;

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God is in the business of healing, and it was the persistent faith of a foreign woman that resulted in her daughter's cure.

Let us be encouraged to remember the Lord often uses ordinary people, to work for His Kingdom.

You and I can share in his mighty work, through the power of His Holy Spirit, if only we are willing to respond to his promptings.

And, of course, Naaman had to learn lessons too. He couldn't have healing on HIS terms.

All his importance; all his wealth and his pride, simply GOT IN THE WAY -
He could never know healing with that attitude.

Again, it was the people around him who gave him wise advice before he could learn this lesson. He needed to make a simple response of obedience, in order to receive what God wanted to give him.

Is God wanting to give to us something we are too proud to receive? Too afraid to ask for?
God wants us to trust him; to have the faith to respond to him;
The willingness to let go of self, in order to receive what he longs to give us.
Can we offer to Him the kind of faith that responds?

For each of us, there are occasions when, for whatever reason, we share in experiences of weakness - of helplessness.

Perhaps we have lost our job; maybe we face a breakdown in a relationship; At times, there may be financial problems; the trauma of bereavement; the emptiness of being alone;

It is to these experiences - to our own areas of weakness and helplessness, that the Lord speaks His words to us:-

"My grace is sufficient for you, for MY POWER is made perfect in YOUR WEAKNESS."
It is at these times that we need the faith that trusts in our heavenly Father, when he alone can be our helper.

Faith - our belief in God - has many facets;

At times it needs to be like the Gentile woman, persistent; not giving up; asking again and again; trusting, waiting, believing.

Sometimes faith needs to make a response like Naaman; - to give in; - to say Yes Lord,

I will do what you ask me; I will be obedient to you;

And sometimes our faith needs to say Hold me Lord. I cannot do this by myself; I cannot see a way forward, but I will allow you to carry me; to strengthen me; to support me through this difficult time.

We don't choose the type of faith we want; We use the type of faith that is suitable for the moment.

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Perhaps, like Naaman we do not yet know the Lord; and yet we long to receive what he offers to us - the forgiveness and the love we've seen and heard about from others;

Or maybe, we've lost our closeness to God and have moved away from His love, and long to know His peace again;

Perhaps like the Gentile woman, we need to experience the wonder of the Lord's healing, for ourselves, or for a loved one. To know His Power at work today.

Whatever our need, God is with us wherever we are this morning. We can invite him to minister to us with his saving healing love.

His blessing is never ours by right; but only and always by the grace that is in Jesus. But we have seen again this morning, that there is no-one beyond the love of the Father.

The Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for MY POWER is made perfect in weakness.

May we come to Him,
that we might receive his blessings and his love. Amen.

Let us take a quiet moment, in which to respond to what God is saying to us now. (pause)
Father, help us to give ourselves anew to you now. In Jesus name, Amen.

SONG - Sing/Faith No 19: Be still and know that I am God.

1 Be still and know that I am God.
 Be still and know that I am God.
 Be still and know that I am God.

2 I am the Lord who saves and heals.
 I am the Lord who saves and heals.
 I am the Lord who saves and heals.

3 In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
 In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
 In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

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Lord, we pray, lifting up our hearts, for people in need and also for ourselves that together we may be strengthened through your healing presence.

Loving God, We pray for all those who seek to further your will in our world working for wellbeing, peace and justice:-

For all who strive to relieve poverty and hunger,
all who work for those denied their human rights,
We pray for those working to alleviate racial abuse.

Lord, forgive us our indifference and bring about your transformation.

May your will be done.

Healing God, our prayers are with those who suffer as a result of Covid19:- for family and friends who mourn the death of loved ones. For all who work in the caring services.

Comfort and support them with your love.

We pray for leaders across the world as they seek to find solutions to this pandemic.

Guide and direct them in wisdom.

We pray for those who are unemployed, especially the young people.
Encourage and bless them.

May your will be done.

We take a moment of silence as we pray for people known to us who are ill or in need at this time. We remember also those suffering across the world because of natural and or man-made disasters. We pray for ourselves that God will heal us in our need through the power of the Holy Spirit.

(SILENCE)

Hear our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:-

LORDS PRAYER 1988 (StF Hymn Book)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
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.

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Hymns and Psalms No 687

- 1 When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*
- 2 Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss,
Not a frown nor a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey.
Chorus
- 3 But we never can prove
The delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.
Chorus
- 4 Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do,
Where He sends we will go -
Never fear, only trust and obey.
Chorus

BLESSING!

Now, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,
To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.
Amen.

May the Lord bless us and keep us close to him as we go forward into these coming days,
trusting in his almighty power. In the name of Christ. Amen.