

## Worship Resources - *Connected*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUqjTpnCS0>

**Pentecost 15, Year B,**

5<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

**James 2:1-10, 14-17 NRSV /Mark 7:24-30 NRSV**

### **Prelude**

### **Welcoming Guests/Announcements**

### **Pass the Peace**

### **Call to Worship** (Responsive)

One: Come and worship!

All: **We will praise the One between, within, and over.**

One: Trust in the One who co-creates the was, the now, and the will-be.

All: **Our hope is in the One who creates expansive love calling us to do the same.**

One: Follow the One who never breaks covenant.

All: **We follow the One whose extravagant love calls us to co-create justice for the oppressed, feed the hungry, unlock prisons, and welcome strangers, orphans, and widows.**

One: Praise the One whose justice is grace-full and inclusive.

All: **We praise the Spirit that spans the ages. Amen!**

### **Invocation**

Faithful God, you draw near to us in our joy and in our grief, in our hope and in our despair. When we are bowed down, you raise us anew. We turn to you now in search of your healing touch. God of compassion and love, move among us this hour. Open our eyes, dispel our fears, and show us the real life you have to offer. We pray this in the name of the Risen One, Jesus the Christ. **Amen.**

### **Opening Music (Lyric Video)**

### ***God is Love***

*(Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing)*

<https://youtu.be/WM67XFmS6hE>

## Epistle Reading      James 2:1-10, 14-17      NRSV

My brothers and sisters,[a] do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?[b]

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,

and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"[c]

have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.[d] Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,[a] if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,

and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

## Hymn      (Lyric Video)

## ***O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing***

written by John Wesley,

posted to YouTube by John Wesley Slider

<https://youtu.be/Jnbuld9YSgw>

# Joys and Concerns

## Pastoral Prayer

Father of Lights, from whom comes every perfect gift,

hear our prayers which we offer fervently to you, and in the name of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray for the church, that we might show forth our faith in action, regard all with impartiality, and be quick to listen and slow to anger. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our nation, that whenever trials may befall us, that God may grant us endurance and wisdom. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the world, that the lowly may be raised up, and that mercy may fall on us all. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the sick, the injured, the vulnerable, and those undergoing all forms of adversity, that they might all be raised up; especially \_\_\_\_\_. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those celebrating this week, especially \_\_\_\_\_. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who have died (especially \_\_\_\_\_), that they would draw near to God, and that God would draw near to them. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious God, let our prayers be offered to you with the gentleness that is born from your wisdom from above, that is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, and full of mercy. Amen.

## Gospel Reading     **Mark 7:24-30 NRSV**

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.<sup>[a]</sup> He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

But she answered him, "Sir,<sup>[b]</sup> even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter."

So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

## **Message – *Connected***

Can you hear me now? Good! I'm sure many of us remember those Verizon Wireless commercials from a few years ago. Commercials meant to impress on us the reliability of that company's network, suggesting that we could count on always having a good connection that would enable us to hear clearly, and not lose our calls. In our lives today, having a good signal and connection becomes more and more important. We have come to rely on our connectedness much more, often not having any other alternatives for communication other than our hand-held devices. How do we feel when that connection is lost, when we find ourselves in those odd spots where there is no signal or wifi to connect us? It can be a little harrowing can't it?

Now for the younger folks among us, not being able to connect to social media can actually cause great anxiety. There have been occasions I've witnessed this with my goddaughter Kylie. It's not pretty. There's twitching and irritability, a sense of being lost without focus. Clearly our connectedness through those networks has become very important today as that is primarily how we communicate with each other and keep plugged in with our community. When we get disconnected, we can feel lost and alone, and there is a sense of helplessness.

Our lesson from Mark this morning is a story of people who find themselves in that same situation, feeling disconnected and separated from their connection to the world. Though there's more than one level of separation at work in this story. We have people who by definition are on the outside of culture. They are Gentiles, which automatically makes them unclean. In addition, the Syrophenician woman is just that, a woman, which means she shouldn't even be addressing a rabbi directly, speaking only through her male relatives.. This is someone who has lost their connection, who is not heard by the Jewish crowd around Jesus. But she isn't the only one in this story on the outside, who has a bad connection to the larger community. Jesus is traveling in a Gentile country. He has stopped at a local home for the evening, and being a rabbi, it undoubtedly would be a Jewish household. However, this was located in the rural area outside of the city of Tyre. His hosts

would most likely have been farmers or craftsmen who provided goods and services to the Gentile city where the woman in the first story lived.

As foreigners from the lower classes, they too would be disconnected from the Gentile society in which they lived. They would probably have been exploited and taken advantage of in much the same way the Jewish elite in Israel took advantage of the poor in that country.

We often read this passage and think that Jesus is being very harsh in his response to the woman in the first story, but if we look at the bigger picture, it's not quite so over the top as it initially seems. From the perspective of her position over his hosts and fellow Jewish immigrants in the area, Jesus can be seen as making a valid point that as someone who profits at the expense of others, she can expect difficulty being seated at the table in the kin-dom of heaven.

Yet can that fully explain the brutal illustration he uses? He compares her and her daughter to common dogs, scavengers who aren't worthy to even be fed the same food as the chosen, the children of Israel. For a moment, it might be helpful to consider that Jesus himself is a little disconnected. We often get so focused on the divinity of Jesus, that we forget that he was also fully human. Is it so far-fetched to consider that he was tired after a long day, and here comes this local woman of privilege asking for healing into the house of the very people her kind oppresses. How would we react in that same situation? He takes a teaching moment and goes a little over the top. And that's where the teacher gets schooled. She turns it around and responds that "even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the children's table." She reminds him of the words of Isaiah that he is to be a "light to the Gentiles" as well as restoring his own people. Unlike the similar story in Matthew, in Mark it is not her faith, but her "words," that earn her and her daughter redemption. She reminds him of his calling and mission, and opens his ears and mouth.

He is reconnected to the Gospel and mission that he momentarily lost sight of. There is a tension in Jesus that we often overlook. Being both human and divine, there must have been a struggle between human foibles and what he knew to be the will of God. We get a precious few glimpses of this struggle, such as his doubt in Gethsemane and his moment of desperation on the cross. It's not hard to understand his dilemma in our story today. Jesus would have been schooled in the Torah as any Jewish male would be. He would have received training in the current dogma and its application in Jewish religious law. There were very clear lines between who was in, and who was out. There was no doubt that there was an us, and a them. And we avoid them as much as possible, so they don't corrupt and defile us. From that perspective, his knee jerk reaction to the Syrophenician woman in our story is perfectly understandable. But he regrouped and got back to his God frame of mind, away from the human interpretation of scriptures that weren't originally meant to permanently exclude and isolate.

Keeping to our cell phone analogy, he got back into an area of service. He was connected again. His struggle in our lesson today is something we can identify with as well. It's pretty easy for us to lose our service, and find ourselves "disconnected." Like Jesus, our culture and our religious backgrounds can cause us to inherently apply dogma that excludes, that creates an "us versus them" system of looking at those around us. We too, can find ways of applying scripture, meant as guides for our personal ethics, to exclude and judge others. It's easy to find excuses wrapped in isolated scriptures to set ourselves apart from those who are different than us, to draw lines between ourselves and others.

There's a story of a town drunk who gave his heart to Jesus Christ. He immediately stopped drinking and began to look for a church and had purposed in his heart that he would attend the first church he found. Determined to turn his life around he found a church and went in. He was met at the door by a couple of ushers and they told the man, "Please go home and clean up, take a bath, cut your hair, shave your beard and then you can come back to church." The man left and did what they asked and came back to the same church the next week. Once again, he was met at the door by the ushers. The former drunk said, "I have done what you asked, I am clean, my hair cut and combed, I am clean shaven and I am ready to come to church." The ushers said to the man, "That is good but your clothes are dirty and torn up. Go get a suit so that you will look nice for church." A little sad, the man decided to do what they asked, after all this was the church he felt he was supposed to attend. So he went out and bought a nice suit, determined that this time they would let him in so he could worship God. The next Sunday the former drunk returned to that same church but this time the man was met by the two ushers and the senior pastor. Together, the three of them explained to the man that he could not come into the church because of his past. How would it look if the town drunk came to their church? The man walked out of the church totally dejected because he desired to worship God in a house of worship with the men and women of God. He sat down on the steps in front of the church and put his head in his hands and began to cry. As he sat there, he felt the hand of someone touch his shoulder. Before he could look up he heard a voice say, "Don't worry my friend, I have been trying to get into that church for years and they won't let me in either." The former drunk looked up and saw a man dressed in a white robe with nail pierced hands. Jesus wanted in that church too.

We too can lose sight of the Gospel we are meant to embody, that grace is available to all and is to be extended to all. We can get so wrapped up in "us" that we forget that we have a commission to share the Gospel with all, not just those who are like "us."

Two big problems can arise when we fall into the "us versus them" way of thinking. First, it can be all too easy to blame "them" for all of our problems. We create scapegoats to avoid taking responsibility for our own part in our circumstances. And scapegoats usually end up being sacrificed in some fashion don't they. Christ's own story bears that out. Second, we can get so wrapped up in ourselves that "we" become our sole focus. We worry about our

building, our attendance, and our own personal worship experience and we forget about our commission to make disciples of all people and nations. Just a hint, they're not in here. If we're not that shining light of which Isaiah speaks, they won't see us. James tells us that faith without works is dead.

There's a tale of an old Scotsman who operated a little rowboat for transporting passengers. One day a passenger noticed that the good old man had carved on one oar the word "Faith" and on the other oar the word "Works." Curiosity led him to ask the meaning of these oars. The old man, being a well-balanced Christian and glad for the opportunity to testify said, "I will show you." Then he dropped one oar and plied the other called Works, and they just went around in circles. Then he dropped that oar and began to ply the oar called Faith, and the little boat just went around in circles again - this time the other way around, but still in a circle. After this demonstration the old man picked up Faith and Works, and plying both oars together, sped swiftly over the water, explaining to his inquiring passenger. "You see, that is the way it is in the Christian life. Dead works without faith are useless, and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere. But faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress, and blessing."

Are we rowing in circles? Are we connected? Do we have service? Or do we need Jesus to clear our ears and straighten out our tongues so we can hear him now and we can speak the truth that there is no them, only we. How can we be a place where all who enter are "us" regardless of who they are or what their background is? This week I hope you will spend time in prayer seeking to think about ways that we can be the disciples we are called to be, connected with full bars and reliable service. What ways can we demonstrate our faith in our community? Can they hear us now? May it be so. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor."  
Let us celebrate our blessings with generosity as we share our gifts and talents to further God's work in our community and world.

## **A Time for Reflection**

Annie Center

## **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

**Generous God, you have made rich and poor, powerful and vulnerable alike in your image. Bless the gifts we have gathered today that we may use them to protect the afflicted and bring greater justice to your world. Amen.**

**HYMN** (Lyric Video)

***There's a Spirit in the Air***

written by Brian Wren

performed and posted to YouTube

by the Olive Tree Church, Luton Lockdown Choir,

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<https://youtu.be/d8r-AkLkxtU>

**Commissioning/Benediction**

When we are consistent, when we do not let up in our pursuit of justice, when we put our trust in God, we will find our way. God's assurance comes through the love, support, and encouragement of one another, so be encouragers. Show mercy and practice loving-kindness, so that others may also learn by experiencing. For this is how we live into God's reign on earth. Go and share the good news of God's love, forgiveness, and mercy. Amen.