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ORDINARY 20A

16th August 2026

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

The light shines in the darkness,
The joy comes in the morning,
The hope rises, each new day.

As I turn to meet with you today,
As I lay down my burdens for a moment,
As I ask forgiveness for my mistakes,
And find acceptance in your love,
Help me to see you here, alongside me, I pray,
And help me to hear your call on my life,
As I seek to follow you,
God of all grace.

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Reading: Matthew 15: 21-28 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

Some passages in the Gospels comfort us immediately, today's passage probably isn't one of them...

A Canaanite woman approaches Jesus, desperate for help for her daughter. She cries out for mercy, she is persistent, courageous, and full of hope. At first, Jesus says nothing.

Then, when the disciples ask him to send her away, his reply seems painfully exclusive: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Even more difficult are the words that follow, comparing the children at the table with the dogs beneath it. If we're honest, these verses make us uncomfortable.

Perhaps they should.

Too often, Christians have rushed to explain away Jesus' words, but maybe this passage invites us to do something deeper: to stay with the discomfort and watch what happens next.

Because the woman refuses to leave, she does not argue with anger. She answers with remarkable courage and wit: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

She refuses to believe that God's mercy is so small it cannot include her, and in that extraordinary exchange, something shifts.

Jesus responds: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter is healed.

The story begins with boundaries, but it ends with grace overflowing those boundaries.

For many scholars, this encounter marks a turning point in Matthew's Gospel. The mission that seemed focused on Israel begins to open towards the wider world. Whether we understand Jesus as revealing this truth for the benefit of those watching, or as allowing himself to be challenged by the courage of this remarkable woman, the outcome is the same: the circle grows wider.

That is good news, for us, and for all people. Sadly, every generation has created new boundaries around God's love. People have been told they are the wrong nationality, the wrong race, the wrong gender, the wrong class, the wrong sexuality, the wrong theology, the wrong kind of believer.

Again and again, someone has stood outside the circle asking, "Is there room for me?" And again and again, the Gospel stretches the circle wider.

This woman reminds us that faith is not passive acceptance. Sometimes faith means refusing to believe that exclusion has the final word. Sometimes faith means trusting in the abundance of God's mercy even when others tell us there is none left.

For those of us seeking to follow Jesus today, this story asks searching questions:

- Where have I assumed the boundaries of God's grace are smaller than they really are?
- Who might still be standing outside the circles that I have drawn?
- And where might God be inviting me to listen to voices that challenge my own assumptions?

The kingdom of God has always been larger than our imaginations. Its table always has another place, its bread is never exhausted, its grace is never rationed. In fact, there is an endless abundance of it.

May you have the courage of the Canaanite woman, the humility to let your understanding of God keep growing, and the confidence to trust that the love of Christ is always reaching further than we imagined.

Hymn / Song:

109 STF – In the darkness of the still night – [YouTube](#)

Blessing

May you go from here, with the love of Christ in your heart.

May you head out into whatever this week has in store for you, with the guidance of the Spirit at work in your life, and the lives of those around you.

May you face the challenges and concerns you are carrying, with the creativity of the Creator in your mind.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers For This Week

Monday 17th August

- Take a moment to look out of the nearest window. What is your eye drawn to? It could be a huge building, a plant in your garden, a neighbouring house, a cat - anything at all. Focus on it for a little while. Take note of the emotions or connections it stirs up in you.

Tuesday 18th August

- Holy Lord, God of plenty,
Today I give thanks for all who help to ensure there is food on the table, stocks on the shelves, milk in the fridge.
Thank you for farmers, lorry drivers, supermarket staff and the thousands of others involved in bringing nourishment to my house.
Today, I am grateful. Amen.

Wednesday 19th August

- Light a candle and watch the flame dance around for a while. Sometimes, we feel like we can do so little to make changes in this chaotic world. Let this candle remind you that we all have our part to play; our 'little light' shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Thursday 20th August

- Find a peaceful spot to sit down, even if you feel you're in the midst of noise and chaos. Ground yourself in the moment by mentally noting:
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can hear
 - 3 things you can touch
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste

Friday 21st August

- Be still, for the presence of the Lord is in this place.
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is all around.
Be still, for the Spirit of the Lord is within you.
- As you pray, may you notice, and be transformed by the grace of God.

Saturday 22nd August

- Place some sticky dots around your home or living space. Maybe in places you go often or, if you choose, only occasionally. Each time you see one let them remind you of the prayers you offer and the God you love.
- e.g. Pop one on a light switch to be reminded Jesus is the light of the world and ask yourself how you will be a light for others.
- Or pop one by the tap to be reminded that Jesus is the water of life and ask yourself what you will do to help those who thirst for righteousness
- Be bold and enable your prayer life to be part of your everyday life