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Weekly Letter –16 August 2026

Matthew 15.21-28

What will happen when you step into God's eternal and unchanging sunlight?

I hope you find these verses full of 'hidden' treasures, and that you will explore the riches here in this passage because they are ultimately about Jesus Christ.

We meet Jesus just north of Israel, and he openly says to a woman who is not a Jew, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", that is, I'm here for the Jewish people, but not you!

We shouldn't be too surprised by this statement, because Jesus was brought up by his pious parents, and therefore grew up in a world in which Jews were set apart (by God). Jesus' words are important on a number of levels, because it shows that he was not some mythical person who (thankfully) easily fits into the 21st century, and what he says fits into a world that historically we know a great deal about.

What's also interesting about these perfectly normal words from a Jew, is that later on Jesus will fulfil God's promises to the people of Israel, and once that is done, God's Kingdom will be open to everyone.

For after his death and resurrection Jesus will say, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations". Matthew 28.19, that is, after Jesus has fulfilled God's work in Israel, a life of purpose and meaning will be open to all, because of God's victory over sin and death. (That probably needs a fuller explanation – but not today!).

Let's get back to Jesus and the Canaanite lady! So on hearing that Jesus is not there for her, she isn't going to let Jesus off the hook!. Having said, "Son of David, take pity on me". She now goes further by kneeling at his feet, and says, "help me". There's a bit more chit chat, and suddenly the tone of the conversation changes dramatically, and Jesus says, "I see you are a lady of great faith, and you are right about people's deepest desires, which is to seek the face of God, and bathe in his light". So instead of being a pious Jew Jesus focuses on the Canaanite lady's desire for God and his light, and he celebrates with her this truth.

Does Jesus change his mind? Well, there are quite a few examples in the Bible in which some would argue that God does change his mind. Think of the Golden calf episode, "the Lord relented", in the Book of Jonah, "God relented of the disaster", and of course when Abraham pleads with God for the people of Sodom. Here we should point out that in these experiences with God, people hear of God's warnings and see his mercy. I hope the following analogy is helpful.

Imagine the sun shining continually. If you step out from the shade into the sunlight, the sun has not changed, but you have! That is, God remains constant, but if we turn towards him or away, we inevitably experience a different perspective of his unchanging love and justice.

So, this wonderful passage is not really about the perseverance of the Canaanite lady, or about Jesus changing his mind, or even how wonderful the woman is, rather we see again how Christ offers us the chance to come out of our shadows (and of course these are dead!), leave the shade behind and enter into a relationship in which you can discover more about what is of ultimate importance to God, namely your future, the Kingdom of God.

Stephen

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Simon Walkling
Bible Readings: Matthew 15:21-28; Isaiah 56: 1-8.

Cycle of Prayer in the Region – we will pray for Hall Street, Llanelli.

Prayers for every household – Manor Road 73-127

WHEN KINDRED LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY

(Lectionary Readings: Genesis 45.1-15 and Psalm 133: Matthew 15 (10-20). 21-28)

God, who is One,
we give you heartfelt thanks for those times when we have known the miracle and wonder of unity.
When broken relationships have been mended, or lost relatives been found.
When love deepens into marriage or an ecumenical partnership renews church life,
thank you, for the gift of unity.

Jesus, who came for all the people, and not only for your own,
who prayed for unity amongst your disciples that would echo your own oneness with God,
thank you, for the gift of unity.

Holy Spirit, who comes to bind us to one another, soothing our old wounds with the oil of unity, come
upon your Church today, to bring the deepest love, that we may find again, a passion to be one, as we
thank you, for the gift of unity.

God, three in One, give us we pray, your gift of unity,
that we, with you, may truly rejoice to be One.

Susan Durber (URC Prayer Handbook 2026).