

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 9 September 2018 Will you help?

Pray that we would be ready to broaden our horizons and accept Jesus' appreciation of the scope of love (anyone in need) rather than limiting it to people we know or with whom we have an affinity.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Mark 7:24-37.

Background We are very aware even these days of huge rifts between different groups including along racial or religious lines but this is nothing new and they were prevalent in the 1st century too. It's not that there wasn't any interchange but there were very definite distinctions and practical segregation with each group tending to look down upon and discriminate against people from outwith their own community. Contact other than that absolutely necessary was frowned upon. Even Jesus' readiness to enter gentile territory is significant. It may be that his initial reluctance to engage with the woman might in part have been to uphold her respectability and not offend too many sensitivities. The fact is that he did help her and the blind man too.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. The notion that every person is equal is the sight of God and ought to be in the sight of us all you would think would be a fairly basic Christian belief but in practice the history of the Church (and indeed of other faiths too) is littered with discrimination and even ill treatment of minority groups of all sorts. How far is this just human nature? Why are our positions on this often so entrenched? How far is fear a factor in discrimination?
2. Think for a moment of all the tensions and conflicts in the wider world. To what extent are they fuelled by deeply entrenched views? To what extent are these related to claims of national or racial superiority or foster negative slurs towards others? What lessons might there be for us in Jesus example of being willing to travel to other areas and encounter people would belonged to a different cultural group? Given that we are becoming much more multicultural even in Scotland what scope is there for that kind of engagement without travelling abroad?
3. Jesus opening words are a bit of an embarrassment to modern ears though I suspect the tone of the conversation he had with the woman was both light-hearted and taking account of others' sensitivities. Nevertheless, we must recognise that Jesus was a Jewish man and part of his culture. His readiness to engage at all was very significant and would have caused consternation with the religious authorities back home. In what ways might Christians in Scotland today have to step outside the bounds of "normally accepted Christian behaviour" in order to be true to the gospel? How willing are we to do that?
4. Prior to this incident it had been largely assumed that the sphere of God's blessing was confined to the people of Israel. There were some glorious exceptions from Old Testament times but they were almost always regarded almost as "honorary Israelites" because of their faithfulness. Here Jesus was signalling the opening up of blessing to gentiles in a more general way. Of course that might be viewed by some as a diminution of the favoured position of Israel. How do we reconcile God's promise of blessing to his people within the Christian Church with the universal nature of the gospel which suggests that there are many many yet outside the fold? How ought that to influence our treatment of those who have currently no interest in the Church?
5. Please discuss/consider anything else that arises from the passage or service.

Prayer Lord thank you that the Good News crossed over into gentile territory and came to us here in Scotland. Help us to cross the boundaries necessary to reach out in our era for Jesus. Amen.