

Morning Worship Orchardhill – 9 September 2018

Lord's Supper

Welcome We gather for worship and round the Lord's Table as we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This is Orchardhill Church, and you're welcome here as a regular or returning friend, as a visitor, and if you're listening on-line.

Candle Lighting then liturgy

Today we come together to celebrate communion. This is a day when we set apart common things from their common usage in an act of remembrance, union and hope. As we light this common candle, we set it apart from its common use. It, in turn, calls us to set ourselves apart. To lay aside our voices, our listening, our thoughts, our mouths in order that we might sing God's praise, hear God's Word, have our minds renewed by God's Spirit, and eat in remembrance of God's Son.

HYMN Spirit of truth and grace (CH4 608)

Prayer of approach

Lord Jesus, our heavenly friend, we gather together in this place today to celebrate the sacrament of holy communion. As You taught us, today we will eat in remembrance of Your body broken - broken to death on a cross, and then risen again, that we may be forgiven. As You taught us, today we will drink in remembrance of Your blood shed, a sign of the new covenant in which we join together in union with You. And we come today not just into Your presence, but with Your presence in us, through Your Spirit, our comforter, teacher, and power.

But we do not come to this table because we are righteous, or good. We come because You are righteous and good, and we are not. We come to remember Your sacrifice, because without it we could not come at all. We do not come lightly, because this is a holy matter. But we do not come with heavy hearts, because we can be confident in You - we come rejoicing in our union with You and the promise of the time to come when we will live forever in Your glorious presence.

Be glorified in us today.

Amen.

Scripture Mark 7:24-37

[24] And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. [25] But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. [26] Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. [27] And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." [28] But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." [29] And he said

to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” [30] And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

[31] Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. [32] And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. [33] And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. [34] And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” [35] And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. [36] And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. [37] And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” [ESV]

HYMN Focus my eyes on You, O Lord (CH4 567)

Sermon

Our reading today consists of two quite unusual stories from the life of Jesus. We start with Jesus attempting to get away from the crowds - just a handful of verses beforehand he feeds 5,000, and the passage after our reading he feeds another 4,000! He is in high demand, so he heads out to the region of Tyre and Sidon - a Gentile region - and tries to avoid everyone. But even with all these precautions, a Gentile woman comes forward and begs him to heal her daughter.

The exchange that follows is probably a whole sermon’s worth in its own right, but suffice to say that Jesus heals her daughter and the woman goes home again.

After this, Jesus returns to the sea of Galilee and they - it never really explains who “they” are here. It could just be the disciples, but I think it’s more likely that the crowds have returned. Anyway, “they” bring him a man who is deaf and with a speech impediment.

Consider, for a moment, what this would mean in this period of history. Most likely he would be regarded as someone who it was impossible to educate - his physical disability would be seen as an indicator of mental disability. It would be an extremely difficult life, and I would imagine extremely lonely too. That’s not to say that he was not necessarily cared for or looked after, but his quality of life would be one of the worst possible.

And I think there’s a good chance that this was someone who didn’t really know anything about Jesus. He’s just brought before this strange man, who proceeds to put his fingers in his ears, and then touches his tongue with spitty hands. He sees the man’s lips move, and suddenly he is healed. He can hear, and he can speak plainly.

The contrast between these two accounts is quite interesting. In the first we have a non-Jewish woman - an unbeliever - who comes on her own to ask Jesus to heal her daughter, which he does without even visiting her house. In the other, we have a Jewish man - although he may know nothing about Jesus, so we don’t know his state of belief either - who is pushed forward through a crowd to Jesus, and Jesus physically touches him in order to heal.

One of the techniques that I've been taught at University when it comes to close reading is what Doug Gay calls "verbing the text". All you do is read through a text and simply write down every verb that occurs. It can be a really fascinating way of thinking about a passage like this. And, if you were to do it with this passage, you would find that one of the verbs that is common to both stories is the verb "beg." In the first, the Syrophenician woman begs Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. In the second, "they" beg Jesus to lay His hands on the afflicted man.

As I was considering this recurring verb, it made me think about begging today. Not the begging that we see in the city centre, although that's another extremely important sermon. But the fact that we don't often beg Jesus for anything anymore, and I began to wonder why this is.

I concluded that there are probably 2 main underlying reasons why we don't.

Firstly, we live in a time and culture where there is much less need for most of us. Yes, there are concerns about the widening wealth gap, and there are still real issues with poverty in our country and around the world. But we, as individuals, rarely have any great pressing needs. We have sufficient income. We have a great healthcare service, and medical advancements mean that we're less at risk from disease and illness, and we live longer than ever before. Yes, there are times when we need things, but our needs are rarely desperate needs - rarely things that we would consider begging for.

Secondly, I think we live in a time and a culture where we no longer expect God to engage with the world. We don't actually expect God to do anything - certainly not anything dramatic. We do not beg, because we do not expect.

I want to share 2 more stories this morning of people who encountered Jesus in ways they did not expect. Neither of them begged, but both encountered the risen Lord.

The first story is of a woman who attended an event being run in Ruchazie. My home church in Whiteinch is involved in a sort of hub church development work in Ruchazie, and at one event they were offering people prayer. I wasn't there that particular evening, although my wife was and my home minister shared this particular story a few weeks later.

One woman came and asked for prayer, although she did not specify what she needed prayer for. So she was prayed for, and went on her way. But later that week she returned to tell more of her story, which I now tell to you.

5 years prior she had suffered a heart attack. She was so scared by this event in her life, and so afraid in particular that she would die in her sleep, that she would wake up every 60-90 minutes through the night, every night, for the past 5 years. After she attended this event and received prayer, she went home. The following day she was woken by her alarm clock. She had slept through the night for the first time in 5 years. She was supposed to take her grandchildren to school, but they all had to rush because none of them were used to her

sleeping until the alarm clock went off! And all that morning at the school gates, she was telling all those around her about the crazy people at the church who had prayed for her.

Now - I've not heard any more over the last few months, but certainly for the first month afterwards there were regular reports that she was still sleeping through.

The second story comes from my friend Chris. Chris is a baptist minister who works as a city centre chaplain in Peterborough. One of things that he does is that he has permission from the Wetherspoon's pub to leave beer mats around the tables on which people can write down things they would like prayer for. Here are Chris' words about one of the occasions he was in the pub:

Bill was drinking Rosé wine in the pub. Alone. Perched on one of those high bar-stools with elbows rested on the high table. Chin in hand. It wasn't the fact that it was just after ten in the morning that made it unusual, it was that most blokes in the pub at that time of the day drink real ale. He looked somewhat strange and out of place with his large glass of pink wine sparkling proudly in the middle of the table.

I went around the tables as usual, placing our prayer beer mats on them, a job I did most Fridays, and when I eventually got to Bill's table, I asked him what he was up to. He explained how he was waiting to get a bus and see his son and grandchild for the weekend. He looked nervous and it turned out he hadn't seen them for a little bit. As he lifted the glass to his lips I noticed that his hand had a black brace on it, the kind with velcro straps and metal bits. I asked him about it and he told me how, six months previously, he had dropped a heavy garden ornament on his fingers and they had been crushed. He said he was in a great deal of pain with them.

I found myself explaining to him that I prayed for people to be healed in the name of Jesus and asked whether he wanted me to pray for his hand. He agreed and held his hand up towards me. I was somewhat surprised by his eagerness and asked if he wanted me to pray there and then. He said that he was happy for me to.

While I was praying he said that a warm sensation had gone through his hand and with that he started moving his fingers. He explained that he hadn't been able to bring his thumb up to touch his fingers before being prayed for, and now he had all the flexibility back!

He kept moving and wriggling his fingers and appeared to be in some kind of shock. I explained to him that it was a sign that God knew him and loved him.

A few minutes later I introduced him to Dave, who is one of my amazing chaplaincy team who hang out with me most Fridays in the pub to show and tell good news. The man explained to Dave what had happened and that he was now able to move his hand, and was freely showing him his new hand movements!

Two weeks later, Bill came back to say thank you with his new and improved hand. He had travelled some distance to come back so that he could express his thanks to us. He also wanted to know more about Jesus. He explained that the hospital had dismissed him from their care

and were “perplexed.” His wife thought it wonderful and was amazed at how her husband’s hand had been made 100% completely better – and was very happy that he could now help around the house!

Why do I share these stories? I share them because I hope that they might raise within you an expectation that God might move in us and in our community today. There is not much I can do to create a desperate need in your life, and, indeed, I would not wish that upon you. But what I can do is bring you stories such as these so that your levels of faith and expectation in what God is willing to do here and now are raised. So that you too, in your own way, may come to call upon God - to beg - to move.

We are gathered here today to celebrate communion. Part of this sacrament is a remembrance of what Christ has done. Here we recognise our desperate need of a Saviour - that we ourselves have done nothing to be deserving of God’s mercy, but that Jesus himself did everything that was required, and took our punishment upon himself on the cross.

But if we simply treat communion as a remembrance, we miss much of its significance. In sharing communion, we also declare our unity with Christ - it is this union with Christ that gives us the word “communion.” Celebrating communion here today is a bold proclamation that Jesus is alive! That we do not just share in stories and remembrance of things that are past, but we have a Lord who is living today, who moves today, whose impact is felt in the world today, who makes a difference in our lives today.

Lastly, when we share in communion, we are also sharing in the hope of the feast to come. Paul, when he tells the Corinthian church about the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, reminds them that in doing so they “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” So when we share communion, it is a reminder of the “not yet” of Jesus. That he has not yet come again. But he will. And on that day we will cease to share communion together, because we will live in full communion with him, and share instead in the wedding feast of Jesus.

We do not beg, because we have no need, and yet we need Jesus more than ever.
We do not beg, because we do not expect, and yet Jesus is alive!

As I was preparing for this morning, thinking about what it was to come to the Lord’s table, thinking about these people who begged Jesus for healing, the phrase that kept on rolling around my head was “Run, don’t walk.” Now - we don’t come forward to the table here in Orchardhill, so this is perhaps more metaphorical than literal. But I urge you today - run, don’t walk. Come in expectation that just one touch from Jesus is all that you need. Come in desperation. As you eat and drink of this bread and wine, do so not just as a ritual, not merely a remembrance, but a declaration of the risen Lord who is alive today and is coming back in glory.

Run, don’t walk.

I want us to listen to a song just now, which I think captures some of this picture of what it can be to share in communion. The lyrics will also come up on the screen, in case anyone struggles to hear them. And once we’ve listened for a moment, we will also take up our offering.

The song is called "O come to the altar".

Video O come to the altar
Offering

The Lord's Supper

Invitation This is the Lord's table. All who choose to come are welcome here. No-one comes in their own worth or strength, but come trusting only in the righteousness of Jesus. Here we remember the death of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Here we enter into communion with the ever present God. Here we anticipate the feast set before us in eternity.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Grace The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
(Elements unveiled if not before)

HYMN Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord (MP 239)
Elders approach Table

Institution As the message of the gospel and the stories of Jesus spread like wildfire during the first century, the first ever recorded words of Jesus are found in the letter written to the church in Corinth. There we are told that Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks to God, he broke it and spoke these words, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me.' He took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me.'

Taking bread and wine As the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; I take these common elements of bread and wine to be set apart to this holy use and mystery.

As he gave thanks and blessed, let us draw near to God, offering our prayers and thanksgiving.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus, we give thanks to you this morning - it is good to thank You, and no-one is more deserving of our thanks and praise. Be lifted up in this place. It was You who chose to create the world out of the overflow of Your love. Everything in the universe is held together in You. Every sunrise and sunset; every flower and tree; every fish and bird. All were created by Your word of power, and You continue to hold all things together day-by-day.

Even when we had failed You, and broken our relationship with You and with each other and with Your creation, still You held all the broken pieces together in Your hands. And then You came down, You were born into this world as a man. You lived and breathed with us. You taught and healed us. You showed us the Kingdom. And yet our brokenness led us to break You. To take the Word made flesh, and wreck that flesh, beating it and hanging it upon the cross. The hands that formed the world and held it together were pierced by cruel nails.

Yet even in death, You held our brokenness. In Your death You bought our forgiveness, and when You rose again on the third day You opened up the way for our restoration - for a new relationship with You, with each other, and with creation.

We thank You Jesus for all that You have done.

But You did not finish there. Your love knows no bounds. You continue to pour out Your love on us each day, and You continue to move in the world and in Your church. We thank You that You are still alive today; that You are still concerned with the affairs of men.

We thank You that You will come again in glory. That heaven will finally be brought to earth. That You, King Jesus will finally reign in all Your majesty.

You have died. You are risen. You will come again.

And so we join with all those saints whose lives have past, all those whom You have called around the world this day, and all those who will come after us, in the great song of the angels:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Now we come to celebrate in this great feast. We proclaim the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins; we declare that Jesus is alive, and we seek union with Him; we announce the imminent coming of His kingdom until He arrives in glory. Send down your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine; that they may become for us the body and blood of your most dear Son, and that we may become for you his living body, loving and caring for the world until the dawning of the perfect day. Most gracious God, accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and receive the offering of ourselves which now we make, our thoughts and words, desires and deeds. Gather into one in your kingdom all who share this one bread and this one cup, that with the faithful of all ages we may with one voice and one heart glorify your name; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns and is worshipped and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever. Amen.

Breaking bread

To remember Jesus our Lord, and in obedience to his command, we do this:

on the night he was betrayed, he **took bread**;
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
“This is my body which is for you:
do this in remembrance of me.”
in the same way he **took the cup**, saying,
“This cup is the new testament sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.”

Agnus Dei

Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace.

Silence

Take, eat. This is the body of Christ which is for you.
Do this remembering him.
This cup is the new covenant sealed by Christ's blood
which was shed that the sins of many might be forgiven.
Drink from it, all of you.

People served.

Session served.

Scripture sentence "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Peace The peace of Christ, above all peace, be with you.

Prayers of Intercession and Dedication

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we thank You for this simple meal of remembrance. We thank You for the opportunity to gather together around this table. Lord, we pray today for those with whom we have shared at this table before, but are not able to be with us today. We pray for those who are physically unable to come today, that You would strengthen them. We pray for those who are emotionally unable to come today, that You would comfort them. We pray for those who are spiritually unable to come today, that You would reveal Yourself to them in new ways and restore their souls. And we pray for those who have left this table to join Your eternal feast in heaven. We remember them all today.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for this simple act of proclamation that You are alive today. We thank You that You are active in our world, turning hearts and minds to You, healing the sick, transforming lives. We pray for those who desperately need Your touch today. We pray for those struggling with their health, either mentally or physically. Would You bring a healing touch to them today. We pray for those struggling with their finances, crippled by debt, facing unemployment, or living with homelessness. We pray that Your church would rise up and be Your hands lifting up the poor and downtrodden. Let our declaration that Jesus is alive be a declaration of actions as much as words. A statement of not of intellectual assent, but living intent. We pray for those we know who need an encounter with a living God, that You would open their eyes and hearts by the power of Your Spirit.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for this simple reminder of the feast that awaits us in eternity. Thank You that we will not always gather round this table here, but one day will gather around Yours. Help us to be agents for Your kingdom here on earth. Let us be catalysts for transformation in this community. Let us bring a touch of heaven in every place we go this week - in our homes, our streets, our workplaces, our schools, the shops we shop in, the parks we walk in - so that every person we meet might know Your touch through us.

Christ has died. So we too die to self so that You might be known.

Christ has risen. So we too live for You, forsaking all others, dedicating our lives to declaring that Jesus is alive.

Christ will come again. So we live in anticipation of Your Kingdom, making ready for Your return.

Amen.

Children and young people return

All age Time

Prayer

Let us join together in the Lord's Prayer:

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. *ELLC 1988*

HYMN O For a Thousand Tongues (CH4 352)

Benediction

Brothers and Sisters - we have been fed today by the body and blood of Jesus. We leave this place changed by His Spirit. We leave this place in the wonderful embrace of the Father's love. We leave this place because there is a world on our doorstep in desperate need of a touch from the King. So let us go - let us run, not walk - into that world, declaring that Jesus is alive!

Sung blessing

*May our God watch between us
until we meet one another again.*