



Email: manseltonurc@gmail.com

Weekly Letter – 20 August 2023

Matthew 15.21-29

Can you continue to grow in faith?

Of course you can!

(This reflection builds on last week's reflection)

When the Canaanite woman first calls out to Jesus, telling him her daughter is in a terrible state, I initially struggled to understand why Jesus made no response. Like you, in order to make a little progress I needed to do some research, ponder on the possibilities, and as always ask God to guide my limited understanding.

Perhaps your experience is similar to the initial experience of the lady? Mine certainly is. I ask God to help so and so, ask again, and then after a while move on, in part because I forget, and I'm not that disciplined.

Here in the exchange between Jesus and the woman, we see a model of faithfulness. The persistence of the mother may remind you that having faith in Christ does not mean that the usual aspects of life no longer apply to you. Rather, Christ entered into the real world of flesh and blood, and he like us had to abide by the essential virtues in life, of courage, fortitude, perseverance, faithfulness, and make a point of practising these virtues (good habits are usually hard won!). Why? Well they help you and I to counter-act lethargy, despair, helplessness, and worst of all indifference. You can see how this mum's 'stickability' results in the Christ's stunning response, "Great is your faith, and what you request is granted"

Without doubt we all need to find the desire within us, and the faith to persevere, for faith in the invisible is in part an act of exploration, of step by step discovering that God above all loves life, not death. He continually states that he desires that you have life in all its fullness, but we as free human beings need to respond.

Perhaps having the faith that existence is meaningful is a good starting point, because it takes you away from focusing on the darkness, or the greyness of life, and let in a little more light into your life. Therefore every time you pray for someone, you take a risk, but you also move beyond your limitations that you have created in your mind. Asking God to do something for someone creates new possibilities of life, and in that sense having faith in the future – God's future must be a wonderful way to live a life!

Stephen

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Stephen Baker
Bible Readings: Psalm 8: Matthew 15.21.28.

Cycle of Prayer in the Swansea Region – we will pray for Christ Well

Prayers for every household – we will pray for Manor Road nos. 74-118

All age Tea and Chat in Christ Well – Tuesday, 22nd Tuesday – 2-4 pm

Spiritual Planning

In our Sunday worship on 13th August we reflected on this verse from Proverbs, chapter 19, verse 21
“The human mind may devise many plans but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established”.

I explained that it seemed to me that as the church is coming to the end of a ministerial vacancy and Simon, the new minister starts in September, now is a good time to reflect on what has been happening in the vacancy and to give some thought to plans for the future.

I invited people in the congregation either in church, or on zoom at home, to consider the following questions in the coming days:

What has been different? :	What has changed? :
What are you looking forward to?	What are you planning for?

As part of my preparation for the service I had looked at a book called Summer Wisdom by Eric Rew, the chapter entitled Plans which includes the Proverbs verse as above and invited the congregation to discuss these further questions which are printed here as well to assist your continuing thoughts and discussions:

- 1) How could planning sometimes get in the way of being open to God’s Spirit?
- 2) How do you react when plans go wrong?
- 3) Why might it be good to pray and ask God what God wants before you draw up your plans?

Eric Rew reminds us that the Proverbs verse explains to us that it is only when our plans fall into line with Gods plans that we can be certain that they will be carried out. It is hard to be sure that we have got our plans right, so we need to be open to the possibility of changing them. Adella

Psalm 23 Also during the Service we heard two versions of Psalm 23 (the familiar one) and the following version read by Adella (written by David Coaker – Editor of ‘Progressive Voices’ published by the Progressive Christianity Network in Britain]

‘God is my pathfinder, protector and provider.
When I open my heart to the divine, the universe and humanity, I feel I have all I need.
When it is time to rest, God urges me to stop. Time to move, I’m urged to follow.
Worn down by life, my spirits are lifted.
I am shown the safe places to pause, pointed towards the safe paths to follow, and embraced by
overwhelming love and compassion at every turn.

As I am faithful. As I discern. As I crawl, stumble and leap towards God’s way, glimmers and glimpses
of heaven can appear, reflect and imbue my life and the life of the world. When the sun sets or the storm
rolls in, the memory, promise and hope of God warms my heart.

When anxiety shakes my being, when confusion overwhelms, when illness limits my options,
God’s presence stills the storm.

A presence I can wait upon, to be overcome by, and glimpse in a loving face,
a presence to nudge me, redirect me, calm me and reassure me.

The blessings of life are all around me. Are they mine to hoard or share?
Are those around me my sisters and brothers, or competitors?

The answer is always love. Love pouring over me, warming my heart and pouring out through my life.

As I crawl, stumble and leap towards God's way, love, truth and compassion follow in my wake.
Heaven breaks into my lie and can be glimpsed in the world.

God is my pathfinder, protector and provider. **Amen**

Psalm 23 - Toki Miyashina – A New Zealand version (submitted by Jen Thomas)

He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,
He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity.
He leads me in ways of efficiency, through calmness of mind; and his guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day, I will not fret, for his presence is here.
His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.
He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity,
by anointing my head with oils of tranquillity. My cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours,
for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord and dwell in his house for ever.

Border crossing God (Genesis 45.1-15: Psalm 133: Romans 11.1-2, 29-32: **Matthew 15.21-28**)

Border crossing God found
amongst people who do not think they are yours,
finding faith in the stranger.
You reach out and make your home where we might not expect.
Help us to find you in the strange land.
Help us to know you in the stranger.
Bless us with the possibility of crossing the borders we have made
to discover you are already there waiting for us to arrive.*

Anne Sardeson (URC Prayer Handbook 2023)

- 'to discover you are already there, waiting for us to arrive' – this is not my phrase but I found it in the commentary ACTS, by Willie James Jennings, WJK 2017.

