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ORDINARY 20A

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The Vine at Home
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Call to worship

We have been called, and we have come.
We have been summoned, and we are here.
We have found the courage to join you in worship, once more, our Lord and our God.
We have come.
Come amongst us, by your Spirit.
Amen.¹

Hymn: 20 STF – Be still for the presence - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Merciful Father,
Thank you for creating all people equal
and calling us your children.

We thank you for the peace that comes
when we live together in harmony.

Forgive us for the times when we have caused division
and when we have been quick to speak and slow to listen.

Help us to be humble in heart
and seekers of reconciliation and peace.

Amen.

Risen Lord,
Thank you for uniting us with your Spirit
And making us one in you.

Thank you for choosing us to be your body in the world
to proclaim your good news
and act in ways of love.

May you be glorified through us
and be made known to the ends of the earth.

Amen.

Compassionate Jesus,
Thank you for showing us your heart for all people

¹ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

for demonstrating welcome to the marginalised
and hospitality to those who others may deem unworthy.

You do not overlook anyone, but know them by each name
We thank and praise you for the same concern you have shown each of us.

Truly you are our Good Shepherd, the giver of abundant life.

Amen.²

We now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Genesis 45:1-15 - [Click for Reading](#)

Psalm 133 - [Click for Reading](#)

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

Reflections on the readings:

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!...For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.” –Psalm 133

Today we hear from JPIT – the Joint Public Issues Team – who help to ground our Bible readings in the context of their work, advising the Methodist Church, Baptist Church, United Reformed Church and Church of Scotland on issues of public policy.

Our readings this week invite us to see and explore a vision of God's kingdom founded on unity. They paint a picture of what it means to be together as God's people, and in doing so challenge us to see who gets included in God's kingdom, and what this means for our lives as followers of Christ.

Psalm 133, in short but sweet words, says that in God's kingdom, the blessing of the Lord is found when God's people are together. Here, the writer says that the unity of God's people is as precious as holy oils and as sacred as Mount Zion. It is in this unity, the psalm says, that the 'life to the full' of God's kingdom is offered. Here we see what Jesus might be hinting at in John 10:10.

So, what does living in this unity look like? Our other readings offer us some illustrations, to see what this is like in practice.

² Opening prayers written by Claire Welch

In Genesis 45, after a long time apart, Joseph and his brothers find themselves together once again. Remarkably, after his life has been turned upside down by their unkindness, Joseph shows his brothers forgiveness. These are people who have treated Joseph unjustly. And yet, just as Joseph has found life by the provision and mercy of God, so he extends this to others – even those who have stood against him.

Instead of turning away, Joseph chooses to stand face to face with those he has been distanced by, and recognises that God's mercy can be shown to them just as it has been to him.

In Matthew 15, we are called to hear this message once again from an unlikely voice. Here, we see Jesus finding himself face to face with a Canaanite woman, pleading for him to heal her daughter. It's important to know that as a Jewish teacher, Jesus would have known the way that his people and the Canaanites were distanced from one another. Their history was one of conflict and distrust, rather than unity. Yet this woman finds the courage and faith to declare that in the Kingdom of God, everyone is brought in. She knows and declares that in Jesus' kingdom, there is space for everyone – Jew and Gentile. God's kingdom is a calling for unity, and in unity, transformation.

Between these stories, we see a picture of unity which calls for radical inclusion. Those who from whom we might once might have been distanced are brought close, an act made possible in God's mercy. These passages paint a vision of God's kingdom where everyone is seen, heard and offered fullness of life in God's love. For the many who hear this call to inclusion from places of exclusion, this is a call for justice. Justice that sees equality, where all people are offered the life of God's kingdom. That together, our understanding of who we are might change, so that all can be offered space.

In Matthew 15, we hear this message from someone standing in a place of exclusion. Yet, whilst the Canaanite woman might once have been considered excluded from God's kingdom, in her faith she declared that with the coming of Christ, she is welcomed in. Justice is offered, that all might be given life. The picture these passages paint invites us to consider what radical inclusion would look like for us today.

You might like to reflect on these questions, and maybe share your responses with someone who you trust or a small group:

Who in our community today do we see as outsiders?

Who do we exclude from our vision of God's kingdom?

In seeking unity, where might we find life in choosing to stand face to face with those we who are excluded, and listen to their call for change? ³

³ Reflection written by Hannah Brown – Joint Public Issues Team

Closing prayers

Loving and gracious God
We give you thanks for the gift of our voices.

For those whose voices make beautiful music, and express emotions and thoughts too complex for words.

For the parents and carers whose voices are a source of security, encouragement and guidance.

For the voices that offer us words of comfort and encouragement, that build us up and give us the strength to keep moving forwards.

For the voices that bring us new ideas and insights that help us better understand the world we live in.

For strong voices that speak up for justice, and fight for a world where no one is forgotten or left behind.

Today we pray for the voiceless in our world, for those who feel their voice is not being heard.

We pray for those who have been robbed of their voice by an oppressive government or an abusive relationship. May they feel the warmth of your love, and be reminded of their worth. May our voices join with theirs to call for justice and peace.

We think of those who use their voices to oppress and intimidate. May they be shown a new way to live and govern, and learn to do so with humility and compassion.

We think of all the ways in which we can use our own voices. We pray for the compassion to offer words of comfort to others, the wisdom to offer guidance and encouragement, and the motivation to raise our voices and stand up for what we believe in.

We are sorry for the times when fear has tightened our throats...

Fear of speaking out of turn and saying the wrong thing. Fear of sticking our heads above the parapet.

Fear of speaking out the ideas and thoughts that could change lives.

God, grant us the courage to raise our voices in your name, in the name of love and justice. May we be your voice in this world, seeking to bring your kingdom closer,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁴

Hymn: 547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship - [YouTube](#)

⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Emma Dobson

Blessing

Go in grace, and know that you are called,
Go in love, to find that calling and pursue it,
Go in the Spirit of the Living God, to grow and learn and be transformed,
Seeking justice in our world, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.⁵

Amen.

⁵ Blessing by Tim Baker