

St John's

My prayer for us as a church is that the Holy Spirit will open our ears to speak to us in new ways and then to open our lips to speak his message to the broken world we live in. Where this is challenging, or even frightening, remember the words in our OT reading:

“Say to those who are of a fearful heart:
Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

What an amazing promise to carry in our pocket when we feel that 'being' church is too scary for us. If we don't do it, then who will? Amen.

Prayers:

We pray for the work of your Church throughout the world; that all your people may be inspired with a vision of your kingdom on earth. Filled with your Spirit of peace and joy, may we spread your love through all the world.

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit - all who need your healing love in their lives today: Merceditas Alvira, Ruth Gillespie, Bala Kompalli, Marion Mason and Chris Tatton-Brown.

We also remember with thanksgiving those who have died recently, including Farah Lungay.

Matthew and Jonny are continuing to say Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer at home. Join them [here](#).

St John's Church

Pew Sheet

5th September 2021

Services this week:
9.30am Sunday - Parish Communion
(with Café St Jean in Church House)
10.30am Wednesday - Holy Communion

The online service for 9.30am on Sunday will be available [here](#).

The church will be open for private prayer:
Sundays - Wednesdays (10.30am-4.30pm).

Say to those who are of a fearful heart:
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.'
Isaiah 35:4

ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST - MISSION STATEMENT

Drawn together by Christ's love, we seek by his grace to live out his commandments to love the Lord our God with all of our being; and to love everyone we come across as we love ourselves.

www.stjohnschurchstanmore.org.uk

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The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity

Collect:

Merciful God, your Son came to save us and bore our sins on the cross: may we trust in your mercy and know your love, rejoicing in the righteousness that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings:

[Isaiah 35:4-7a](#)

[James 2:1-10, 14-17](#)

[Mark 7:24-37](#)

Short Sermon from Matthew Stone

The story of Jesus' conversation with the Syrophenician woman is perhaps best described as controversial, and I shall return to it shortly, but I want to begin with the other half of today's Gospel: the miracle of healing the deaf man. It is easy to get lost in a debate about miracles: did they really happen? Do they still? If so, why some and not others? If not, is God smaller and more limited than we would like? Does He really make any difference at all?

These are important and difficult questions which I encourage you to explore, but they are not where I want us to look this morning. In the Gospels, Jesus is generally described as performing "signs", of which this is one, rather than "miracles". And the word "sign" prompts us to ask: a sign of what? Or even a sign to where? Looking at it this way enables us to focus on what we are intended to see, understand, or even do, as a result of this "sign"? Where did Jesus and the Gospel writer intend us to be led by it? My reflections are:

First, the man was brought to Jesus by his friends. He was deaf, and so unable to hear Jesus' teaching for himself, or hear others talk about him, and we know he could not speak. This means it was unlikely he had requested to be brought: the idea was almost certainly his friends', rather than his own. And I believe this is a sign, and reminder to us all, that our friends who have not yet encountered God, who are deaf to the teachings of the Bible and the church, need us to take the initiative and bring them to Jesus.

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Second, Jesus met the man's needs where he was. As someone deaf and unable to speak, communication would have been very difficult. But Jesus acted out his intentions before carrying them out, so the man understood what was going on. He mimed the opening of his ears by putting his fingers in them and removing them. The spitting and touching the man's tongue sounds repellent to us, but spit was believed to have healing properties, so again it was a form of mime to demonstrate what was to happen. Only then did he speak the words. When we seek to bring a friend to Jesus, we must remember to begin with where they are, with engaging with what they understand and communicating in a way they can access.

Third, I believe this "sign" is also a sign to all of us about our need to allow Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to open our ears to what he is saying, and then open our mouths to speak it clearly to others. Could we see ourselves as the deaf man? And if so, what is it that Jesus is asking us to do?

The amazing Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, has tweeted that "On Sundays lots of Followers of Christ will gather to 'do' church before then being sent out to 'be' church in the week ahead." Perhaps this is the greatest challenge to us here at St John's, that Jesus has called us not just to do church as we are this morning, but to be church – putting our faith into actions in new and transforming ways?

One form of 'being' church, which is particularly scary, is speaking out against injustice where we see it. This can be particularly daunting, and this is where I believe the story of the Syrophenician woman plays its part in encouraging us. The phoenician region was one of the richest in the area, ruled by Rome, and used Galilee as its breadbasket.

Rather than viewing Jesus' response as insulting to one begging, some consider it as a pointed political rejection of a ruling class mistreating the oppressed. Her response demonstrates her agreement, and so Jesus accepts her in return. In this light, it is an exhortation to us all to name and challenge injustice, especially systemic and institutional injustice, while at the same time never to reject individuals because of it.

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