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ORDINARY 21C

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A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

The Lord is our refuge,
Our strong tower,
The rock we can build our lives upon.

Today, I use my voice to praise you.
Every breath I take is noted and known,
Every moment is seen;
You will never put us to shame
but instead give us the safety of your arms to return to
as I live my lives.

As I enter this time of worship,
I pray that my words of adoration,
My heartfelt confessions,
And my affirmations of faith will be acceptable to you.

Amen.

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version or translation known to you.

Hymn:

152 STF – This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made - [YouTube](#)

Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-10 – [Click for reading](#)
Luke 13:10-17 – [Click for reading](#)

Response to the readings

[This is part of a longer reflection, available in The Vine resources for this week. For full access to The Vine, find out if your circuit is subscribed by emailing thevine@twelvebaskets.co.uk]

Today's gospel reading has always been an important and formational one for me. Jesus the healer, the bringer of good news, demonstrating that he won't be held back by the systems and structures of his day, or the religious institution he is operating within.

It seems to me to be a story about priorities, and the dangers of being overly pious. Pious was a title taken by many of the popes in the early part of the Catholic Church's history, but the word has increasingly become associated with the kind of religious behaviour that Wesley might have called 'a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.' There is some piousness (is that even a word?) in this story, and there is definitely some confusion about priorities, which Jesus identifies and calls out.

The synagogue leader in this story demonstrates the pious, rule-bound attitude in verse 11 when he says his line with what the NIV translates as 'indignance': "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

He's read the rulebook. He knows what is and isn't allowed. And he's determined to stick to it. But this is where Jesus questions the priorities of the rule-book, and sets up an alternative to the pious narrative of rule-following: so, you'd happily take your donkey for a drink, but you wouldn't help a suffering woman? What does this say about your priorities? What does this say about your pious rulebook?

Getting a drink for the donkey is, of course, not just an act of kindness towards an animal (which it is – to a certain extent), it is also an investment in your own wealth. Animal ownership was (and in many parts of the world, still is) a marker of wealth so this sabbath behaviour that Jesus is criticising was as much about investing in and protecting your possessions as anything else. And Jesus is pointing out that people are happy to prioritise their own wealth, but not the wellbeing or health of a woman who would have been at the margins of society because of her affliction. The system is broken. The rules aren't working for everyone. It's time to re-think.

Which sounds a lot like how the great innovators and entrepreneurs have thought about rules and regulations for centuries, and are doing again today. Recognising that systems and structures and rules have value, but they need rethinking and rewriting as societies change and as people come to see the rules as an end in themselves, rather than a means of grace. Many of the large institutions that have been built over the last few centuries (and even millennia) are struggling to stay relevant and alive in the twenty-first century, because they are clinging too tightly to systems and structures that need rethinking and rewriting. The established church denominations in the UK probably all fit into this generalisation to one extent or another...

What does that mean for us today?

What rules and systems and institutions do we need to hold a little less lightly, or rewrite, or rethink, or even tear down, so that the good news of God can spread a little more freely?

What are our priorities?

Where are we a little too pious, and a not quite so gospel-orientated?

You might like to make some time to think about, reflect on, or talk about these questions this week.

The Jeremiah reading shows us that all this is in God's hand. We were known and loved by the divine before we were even formed in our mother's womb. So, this is not about us, or our egos. We are not 'creating new forms of church' on our own or to suit us, but are continuing the work Jesus began: bringing the gospel to life in our context and in our time. We are responding to the gospel invitation to share God's love with the people of all nations. Not to build the church, but to see the Kingdom of God come near.

Let us go and be people who question authority, who are shaped for mission, by the grace of God, in Jesus' name and through the strength of the Spirit.
Amen.

Blessing

May Almighty God give you strength to run the race that is set before you, give you power and hope to persevere to the end; and the blessing of God the Creator, the Christ and the Spirit go with you.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

Monday 22nd August

- Today, every year, various different traditions celebrate two separate 'holy days' that point to Mary, the Mother of Jesus: 'the Immaculate Heart of Mary' and the 'Queenship of Mary'.

So today, we give thanks for mothers everywhere. And pray for those who find the conversation around mothering difficult: those who have lost children, or lost touch with their children. Those who wanted children but have not been able to, those on the quest for children. Those who have difficult or broken relationships with their own mothers, or who miss them. God, who came to visit a woman 2,000 years ago, and chose to have an earthly mother, hear our prayer.

Tuesday 23rd August

- As I come to you in prayer, I know that the world is grieving and in pain,
It is a world longing to know you more,
A world full of stories that seek to give meaning, but which are little more than adverts for the next product or holiday or cause.
In that context, I turn to you, and to the gospel of Jesus Christ,
Who brings hope to us all.
- Amongst all the piousness of human institutions,
the limitations of rules, the selfishness of structures, the greedy priorities of the world we have built,
I pray for your grace, your peace, your love to reach the nations.
Amen.

Wednesday 24th August

- On this day in 1991, Ukraine declared itself independent from the Soviet Union, as the USSR collapsed. Our prayers are for the people of Ukraine. Prayers for peace. Prayers for opportunities to rebuild. Prayers for an end to war and conflict and oppression.
You might like to light a candle, or hold a quiet space, and pray into this situation, perhaps using one of the news stories that have emerged in the last day or two.

Thursday 25th August

- Why not spend some time in silent meditation today?
- You could set an alarm – perhaps for 10-15 minutes, and then find somewhere comfortable, where you can sit and empty your mind.
 - If it helps, you could use the Headspace app or website, or a similar service, to help you focus on the meditation and get used to the idea of sitting in silence for a length of time.
- Is this a practice you could include in your daily spiritual life?

Friday 26th August

- If you can, go on a prayer walk. Or ask someone to help you make a journey around your neighbourhood – just the few houses near you would be fine, or go on a longer trip if you'd like to take in a whole estate or community.
- As you travel past each house, pray for the people who live there – just in your mind, or under your breath. Hold their situations, whether you know them or not, in your heart.

Saturday 27th August

- As we head into a bank holiday weekend, which may change your rhythms, you are simply invited to notice something new. Perhaps you have to work extra hours this weekend, or perhaps you can relax. Maybe you have family-time booked in, or are going away. Maybe you will be at Greenbelt Festival, or something else that will fill your soul.

Whatever you are doing – notice the newness, the changes of rhythm, and give thanks for a God who is always revealing new things to us. Isaiah 43:19.