

Reflections for August 16th - 10th Sunday after Trinity

A place at the table

At home we have a round dining table. I wanted one because it reminds me of some friends of ours, who had a big round table in their kitchen. Their home was a busy and welcoming place, with lots of different people coming and going. Their round table was comfortable for just two or three people, but also seemed to expand when needed to fit more people around it than seemed possible.

Our gospel reading this week may seem to be in some ways a strange and uncomfortable story, with Jesus initially reacting in a way that we would not expect. Jesus was trying to withdraw, to get a short break from all the demands that the crowds of people were making of him, but a foreign woman was determined to ask for his help to heal her daughter, and she would not give up. At first Jesus refused, saying that his priority was the people of Israel, and when she persisted, kneeling before him to plead with him, he said a hard thing:

It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

But still she wouldn't give up, and her clever reply managed both to respect what he had said, but also to challenge it at the same time:

Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

Then Jesus seemed to change his mind, and he recognised the depth of the woman's faith, and assured her that her daughter was healed and made well.

I still like round tables, because for me they suggest an equal welcome at the table for all who come. Sometimes I wonder how our celebration of Holy Communion would feel, if we gathered together at a round table to share it. This week's gospel tells us about this woman who was a foreigner, and a stranger, but who was so determined to get help for her daughter, that eventually she drew from Jesus a recognition of her faith, and a beautiful example of the truth that, in the love of God, there is a place at the table for everyone who comes.

Revd John Waller

O God whose word is life,
and whose delight is to answer our cry,
give us faith like this woman
who refused to stay an outsider,
and so found a place
at the table of your welcoming love.
Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 56. 1, 6-8; Romans 11. 1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15. 21-28