

Reflections for 5th September 2021

14th Sunday after Trinity

An Open Place

Last week's New Testament reading, from James chapter 1, spoke about the importance of not just hearing the word of God, but doing something about it and putting it into practice. This week's reading, from chapter 2, follows that up with a clear example of 'doing the word' by not judging people or showing favouritism. However rich or finely dressed someone may be, or however poor and humble they may look, every person is to be welcomed and valued in the same way.

Turning to our gospel reading, there are things in it that I find uncomfortable. Jesus at first refused a woman who came to plead with him for her daughter. Why? Was he tired and drained? Was he trying to retreat and rest, and didn't want to be disturbed? In his human life and ministry, was he trying to restrict his work to the Jewish people alone, even when a non-Jewish woman stood before him in great need? But the good news within this story is that Jesus did hear her, and, in response to her respectful but persistent pleading, he changed his mind, and healed her daughter. There may be a lesson there about persistence in prayer, and there is also a sign of the breadth of God's love – and the developing understanding through the scriptures that God's love is for all, and nobody is to be excluded.

We are called to be a church that is an open place, and not a narrow and restrictive place. A church that reflects the breadth and depth and variety of God's creativity, and the dangerous generosity of the gospel, as we see in the letter of James, and in the person of Jesus, who was ready to change his mind, and respond to the persistent challenge of a woman he could so easily have ignored, and to include her in the embrace of God's love.

Revd John Waller

God of our pilgrimage,
you have willed that the gate of mercy
should stand open for those who trust in you:
look upon us with your favour
that we who follow the path of your will
may never wander from the way of life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 35. 4-7; James 2. 1-10; Mark 7. 24-37

Story: 'The Pharisee and the Tax Collector' (based on Luke 18. 9-14)