

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

REMOVING BARRIERS

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Accepting the Gentile woman (Matthew 15: 21-28)

Jesus lived in a society in which the sense of being God's chosen people built a strong barrier between the Jewish people and the rest of the world, the Gentile nations. Jesus' own initial ministry was to the Jewish people, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He has already fed five thousand Jews and twelve baskets full of crumbs were left over. The encounter with the Canaanite woman and with her faith shows that the barrier can be dissolved and the good news of the Kingdom extended to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

Our image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman is *removing barriers*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 15: 22, 26-28; for reflection throughout the week)

A Canaanite woman from that region came out
and started shouting,
'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is tormented by a demon.'
Jesus answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food
and throw it to the dogs.'
She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs
that fall from their master's table.'
Then Jesus answered her,
'Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.'
And her daughter was healed instantly.

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you took away the barriers
between Jews and Gentiles.
Remove the barriers which divide our world,
that all people may live to praise your name;
now and for ever.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 15: 21-28

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 15: 21-28)

Begin to explore Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What do you make of the Canaanite woman addressing Jesus as 'Lord, Son of David'?
- How do you interpret Jesus' response, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'?
- What do you see in the sentence, 'to take the children's food and throw it to dogs'?
- How do you interpret Jesus' response, 'Woman great is your faith'?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore how Matthew develops Mark's account of the meeting with the Gentile woman by adding the narrative concerning Jesus' first priority being the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

- Mark 7: 24-30

Explore how Matthew uses the refrain 'Have mercy on me Son of David'.

- Matthew 9: 27
- Matthew 20: 30-31

Explore how Paul develops his theology of removing the barrier between Jews and Gentiles.

- Romans 10: 9-13
- Galatians 3: 25-29

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY (YEAR A) Sunday 16 August 2026

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Images of barriers
- Racial barriers
- Unconscious bias

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman is *removing barriers*. Draw on your experience of barriers. For example:

- Reflect on your experience of barriers between people.
- Reflect on your experience of overcoming barriers between people.
- Reflect on what your church is doing or should do to remove barriers between people.

What have you learned about removing barriers?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by the theme of Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman or by the image of removing barriers.

- Make a collage of the different physical barriers that keep people out.
- Make a poster that celebrates different people living and working together: Jesus dissolves barriers between people.
- Collect images of barriers being removed.
- Create a reflection, poem or prayer on the theme of Matthew's account of Jesus accepting the Gentile woman or on the image of removing barriers.



EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



The scripture quotations contained in these materials are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised Edition, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and is used with permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright © Leslie J. Francis, 2026
Canon Theologian Liverpool Cathedral
with sponsorship and support from
St Mary's Centre, Wales