

Mark 7: 24 – 37

'No Borders'

September – can be a month viewed with excitement or with worry – or both!! It's a month of new beginnings for many people – especially young people and children. New Class, new school, new college, new job ...

So I'd like you to imagine you are a child – going to a new school this week. Or you're older and about to start a new job.

What would help you to feel quickly that you belonged ... that it was a good place to be? *(Revd Judy asked us to chat amongst ourselves then she would ask for ideas ... suggestions were a smile, a nice teacher, a friendly person, being generous in sharing, a good lunch, someone taking an interest in you and helping ... etc.)*

And what would do the opposite ... what would make you feel a bit of an outsider? *(again, discussion ...)*

This is all about feeling and being included – about inclusion.

Today's Gospel reading from Mark tells us of two people who not only felt that they weren't welcome – it was really true. Neither of them was welcome in Israel because they were not Jewish. The woman was a Gentile – a non-Jew. That was what defined her and made her not welcome. A Gentile and a woman – Jesus should not have spoken to her. But he did.

She had clearly heard of Jesus. She came to find him, to beg healing for her daughter. It may be a bit tricky for us to understand all the ins and outs of the – to us – strange conversation they had, but the result was Jesus spoke to her and her daughter was healed. Religious and cultural boundaries are no barrier to God's kingdom.

And the man who was deaf was also not a Jew – he came from Decapolis. And Jesus speaks to him too, and he too is healed. And if we didn't get it with the woman and her daughter, Mark is explicit this time: this is what God wants – it is fulfilment of the prophecy in **Isaiah chapter 35** – a prophecy about how God's kingdom will come to the whole world, not just the Jews.

Church

And the Christian Church is tasked by God to be a sign of his kingdom – to be organised for and to have the attitudes of the kingdom – to be as inclusive as Jesus was. So, look around and think who isn't here ... and it is because we've failed to be as inclusive as we could be?

- To young families?
- To those who can't read?
- To those with dementia?
- To those whose first language is not English?

You may see other gaps ... and the course we're running in the Autumn is to help us to be inclusive and understanding of very different views on sexuality: **'Living in Love and Faith.'**

Let's then ask Jesus to show us where we're not being inclusive enough – where we're leaving barriers or borders in place. Talk about this – raise it with me or other PCC members ...

And let's be aware of those who – this month are starting something or somewhere new and ask Jesus to nudge us and others into making them feel welcome and to know that they belong.

Pray for openness and inclusion: *(Meriel then took over by giving us all little coloured 'links' that we could use to think of individuals or groups whom we would like to see made more welcome in our church and/or local community. We linked them all together ... then brought them up to the table and each one was linked on to every other link to make one long chain).*

Pray together for greater inclusion in your community:

'Faithful God, you invite everyone to be part of your kingdom.

Help us to share your story and your love with a world that so often divides and excludes.

Show us how not to be part of the problem, but to be generous in our welcome

and courageous and inclusive in our love for all.

Help us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.'

Amen.