

# HIDDEN RIVER CIRCUIT DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES

## **Edition 18: February 2026**

Welcome to this edition of Circuit reflections, to inspire you keep faith with God, to read his Word and spend time in Prayer with Thanksgiving, offering all our concerns to One who cares for us more than we can ever imagine. We particularly remember Mike Smith who contributed regularly and thoughtfully to this venture of sharing faith, and who sadly left us on December 28<sup>th</sup> 2025, to be with our Lord Jesus. We have been blessed to have one more contribution from him, and we print it here, a reflection on how Grace supercedes Sin and how gracious our God is to us.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this February edition.

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## **WEEK 1: 1<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY 2026: Look! The Lamb of God**

### **A Reflection by Richard Brinck-Johnsen (Circuit Administrator)**

#### **Scripture reading: John 1:29-42**

*The following has been adapted from a sermon delivered at the chapel service at St John's Methodist Church on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026:*

A few weeks ago, those of us who faithfully came out in the snow to the chapel service here which fell on the actual day of Epiphany heard Revd Gary's thoughts on the story of water being turned into wine at the wedding of Cana which follows on immediately after the reading we have just heard. The following week Deacon Helen spoke about the light overcoming the darkness based on the prologue from John's Gospel which we strongly associate with Christmas. This passage (John 1:29-42) is usually set for the second Sunday of the Epiphany season which bridges between Christmas and Lent. So, it also bridges between the prologue in John's Gospel chapter one and the miracle of water being changed into wine, the first of the seven signs which appear during the first half of John's Gospel. I recall that Gary wondered how good we are at noticing things and as we spend the next few minutes thinking about John's Gospel, I want to again ask the question what is it that both the writer of John's Gospel and John the Baptist want us to notice about Jesus. John the Baptist clearly noticed Jesus coming towards him when he says "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The fact that John again says "Look, the lamb of God" when he sees Jesus walking nearby the following day (and the fact the Gospel writer records this repetition) suggests it must be important. So why does John's Gospel want us to take notice of Jesus and why is this

important to all of us whether we're someone who comes to church regularly or just occasionally and why is it also just as important, if not more so, to those outside our fellowship. If the message of who Jesus is, is for everyone then how do we who have heard it respond to that calling.

John 1:29 picks up the story after John the Baptist has been given clear testimony that he is not the Messiah but only the forerunner making clear reference to Isaiah chapter 40 that his role is to Make straight the way for the Lord. We then get Jesus' entry into the story. The immediate thing we notice is that in both the preceding section and the passage was heard, the actual baptism of Jesus isn't specifically mentioned. We do however have John again testifying to having seen the Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove referring to the missing scene as a confirmation that he is the God's chosen one. This suggests that the author of John is writing for an audience who may already have read the accounts of Jesus' baptism that are found in Mark, Matthew and Luke so occasionally certain details such as Jesus being baptised by John are skipped over.

It is an often-repeated fact that John's Gospel is written in a very different style to the other Gospels of the New Testament, however this doesn't make it less reliable. The first section of the Gospel from John 1:19 through to end of chapter 12 is generally referred to as the Book of Signs, referring to the seven signs of who Jesus was. As I've already mentioned the first of these was the transformation of water into wine which as Gary spoke about is a sign of Jesus being God's gift to us linking back to the gifts given to the infant Jesus by the wise men. This and the subsequent signs culminating in the raising of Lazarus are clearly intended by John to indicate who Jesus was and what he came to do.

Whilst it is generally agreed that the finished Gospel that we have today probably wasn't assembled in its final form until quite late in the first century, It is thought that the Book of Signs may have started to be written by sources close to the apostle John as early the 60s AD making it much more closely contemporary to Mark's Gospel. This would account for it containing details which seem to have come from another eyewitness to the events being described. The author is never explicitly named and later sections of the Gospel coyly refer to Beloved disciple which again suggests there was still a connection back to the original Apostle John not to be confused with John the Baptist. Without wanting to go too far down this rabbit hole as there appears to have been at least one other John who wrote the Book of Revelation, there seem to have been a lot of Johns around in the early church!

The standout verse from this passage which as I already mentioned must be important because we are told that John the Baptist says part of it twice in a short space of time, "Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." When we think about Jesus as the Lamb of God it is interesting to note that John's Gospel is the only one to mention Jesus participating in three separate Passover festivals during his ministry which seems connected the importance of the Passover Lamb, sacrificed for all. John's Gospel clearly wants us to really look at who Jesus is and it is noticeable that in the speeches in which Jesus talks about himself and elsewhere, sheep and lambs are a regular feature in this Gospel. Two notable instances are found amongst the 'I am' sayings which are unique to John's Gospel "I am the gate for the sheep" and "I am the good shepherd" and in the very final chapter we have Jesus' exhortations to Peter to "feed my lambs" and "take care of my sheep." The 'I am' sayings which are probably the standout moments of this Gospel are clearly the writer's invitation for us to take notice of Jesus as he is described not just as the Lamb of God or the Good Shepherd but also the Light of the World and the Resurrection and the Life amongst others.

The image of Jesus as the Lamb of God also called to mind the answer to the question which was posed during an Advent sermon by our friend John Hill: Why were shepherds, the lowest of the low in the Jewish society in Roman occupied Judea, called to the first visitors to the infant Jesus? To which the answer was who else should be called to be present at the birth of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. This was a reference to the Revelation 13 verse 8 which reinforces the words given to John the Baptist.

Jesus has arrived as a gift from God as the sacrificial lamb to take away the sins of the whole world, for all time that has passed and all that is yet to come, an impossible calculation to wrap our heads around.

As we continue through this liturgical year out of Epiphany into the season of Lent, may we remember that the gift of Jesus wasn't just a child born to be king of an unseen kingdom. That Jesus came to take away the sins of the whole world means that the message of God's love is for all people not just those of us who have experienced the call to follow Jesus which at the end of the passage we read of Andrew, Peter and the other unnamed disciple responding to. He is the gift of God's love for all people, even if they are not fortunate enough to have heard the call and not just those of us who describe ourselves as Christian. The gift and message of God's love is for everyone, even those we would struggle to accept on a human level.

May we respond to the challenge to share the signs of God's love with others. May we also reflect the Advent signs that Deacon Helen reminded us of hope, love, joy and peace and may we be able to notice those signs in others where we might not expect them. As I write these words during January's week of prayer for Christian Unity, can I encourage us to focus on those things which we have in common with our siblings from across the many church traditions, of which I now have the privilege to now represent two as both an Anglican and a Methodist. As the late MP Jo Cox said in her maiden speech to parliament in 2015, "We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than that which divides us."

As we extend the hand of friendship across our churches, may we further extend our friendship into our wider communities and remember the great gift of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who has taken away our sins and has also done so for the whole world. Amen.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, You bring us together in all our diversity, as family and church. Help us to share Your hope wherever we find ourselves. releasing the joy and the true hope of Your eternal love for all. Amen.

### **Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away** by Stuart Townend, Keith & Kristyn Getty

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away	The blood that cleanses every stain from sin
Slain for us: and we remember:	Shed for you: Drink and remember.
The promise made that all who come in faith	He drained death's cup that all may enter in
Find forgiveness at the cross.	To receive the Life of God.

#### *So we share in this Bread of Life*

<i>And we drink of His sacrifice,</i>	And so with thankfulness and faith
<i>As a sign of our bonds of peace</i>	We rise to respond and to remember
<i>Around the table of the King.</i>	Our call to follow in the steps of Christ
	As his body here on earth.

The body of our Saviour, Jesus Christ	<i>As we share in His suffering,</i>
Torn for you: eat and remember.	<i>We proclaim: Christ will come again!</i>
The wounds that heal,	<i>And we'll join in the feast of heaven</i>
The death that brings us	<i>Around the table of the King.</i>
Paid the price to make us one.	

## WEEK 2: February 8<sup>th</sup> 2026: “FALLEN WOMEN”

### A Posthumous Reflection by Mike Smith

Scripture: Mark ch 2 vv 13 – 17

People who are, in their own words, “not religious” sometimes accuse believing Christians of being obsessed with the idea of sin. They are wrong, of course, but it may be that some of the language and practices of the Church have given the impression that church people regard themselves as holy, set apart from ordinary mortals, and that this gives them the right to despise, condemn and even punish those labelled as “sinners”.

Not many years ago two striking and shocking movies were made, one fictional and the other based on a real woman, but both films drew on real life experiences of so-called “fallen” women: “The Magdalene Sisters” (2002) and “Philomena” (2013). The first was a portrayal of the lives of four unmarried Irish girls who either loved foolishly or were pressurised into intimacy, and became pregnant; in each case the consequence was that the baby would be taken away from its mother and put up for adoption; the so-called “fallen woman” was banished from her family, placed in a convent community supervised by nuns, put to work in a laundry, and kept virtually prisoner, regularly bullied and humiliated by those who were supposed to be responsible for their welfare, and sometimes sexually abused by priests – and all of this in the name of the Christian Church and its imagined duty to punish people for their sins by turning them into outcasts. The second (Oscar-winning) film starred Dame Judi Dench as Philomena Lee, a real person whose baby was taken from her and adopted, and follows her forty-year search for her son; she comes across as a feisty woman with positive character, and there are moments of laughter as well as tears: as the Daily Telegraph wrote: “Dame Judi breaks your heart and then mends it”.

Thankfully this abomination was brought to light and the institutional workhouses closed, but in the light of Mark’s text we need to examine carefully what we mean when we label people as “sinners”. What was Jesus doing by keeping company with people of doubtful reputation (both men and women), and what should be our attitude towards those who do wrong?

The issue is raised by the conversion to discipleship of Levi the tax-collector, despised by the respectable people as a collaborator with the occupying Roman authorities. It is interesting to notice that Jesus sees no urgent need to minister to the “righteous”, or “virtuous”, or “respectable” (depending on which version is being read). They are the “healthy” who can look after themselves and have few social problems. His concern is for two other categories of people: the sinners, for which the Good News text uses the word “outcasts”, and the self-righteous (the Teachers of the Law, who are supposed to be the most religious of all, but who have no understanding of the problematic lives of the “sick”, the ones cast out by society. These “sinners” are mainly the most disadvantaged, at the bottom of the social league table, victims of discrimination and denial of opportunity, driven by desperation into petty theft, drug dealing or prostitution: certainly not the nicest of people, probably embittered and alienated from social acceptance, but, as Jesus defined them, “sick” rather than “wicked”. The word most commonly used in the Greek New Testament for “sinner” is *hamartolos*, which conveys the idea of “missing the target”, falling short of the perfect aim – a much gentler concept than one of malicious, evil desire to do harm. And it is at this point we discover that, to a greater or lesser extent, we are all *hamartoloi*; all weak in temptation, sometimes selfish in outlook, foolish in word and deed, and in need of forgiveness.

So perhaps we Christians are right after all to remind people that sin is powerful and destructive of happiness, and admit that we get things wrong ourselves sometimes – but also we preach the Good News that we can be “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven”, as Henry Francis Lyle’s great hymn puts it (HAP 13, StF 83).

One of the most revealing incidents in the gospels tells of how a woman was dragged into the Temple and accused of being caught in bed with someone else’s husband. Outraged Pharisees quoted the Law on

adultery to Jesus and asked him if he agreed that the woman deserved death by stoning. What happened next tells us a great deal about the amazing grace of our Lord: he replied, “Let whichever of you is free from sin throw the first stone at her.” To this not even the self-righteous Pharisees had an answer, and they left Jesus alone with the woman. “Has no one condemned you?” he asked her. “No one, sir.” she replied. And here is the real message of grace: “*Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again*”.

It remains true that sin is serious wrong and to be avoided; confession is a necessary part of our worship. Yet here is also absolution: an understanding of human weakness; here is the valuing of a human soul even in foolishness; here is an offer of help in our resolve to learn from our mistakes and become, little by little, nearer to being the sort of people we ought to be. Jesus judged people (even the less-than-perfect ones he called to be his apostles!), not by where they were coming from but by where, through his grace, they might be going to.

Hymns and Psalms 521 and Singing TheFaith 426

Hark, my soul! It is the Lord;  
'tis thy Saviour, hear his word;  
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:  
"Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?"

"I delivered thee when bound,  
And, when bleeding, healed thy wound;  
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,  
Turned thy darkness into light."

"Can a woman's tender care  
Cease towards the child she bare?  
Yes she may forgetful be  
Yet will I remember thee.

"Mine is an unchanging love,  
Higher than the heights above,  
Deeper than the depths beneath,  
Free and faithful, strong as death.

"Thou shalt see my glory soon,  
When the work of grace is done;  
Partner of my throne shall be;  
Say poor sinner, lov'st thou me?"

Lord! It is my chief complaint  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love thee and adore;  
O for grace to love thee more!

*William Cowper*

We love that Mike will see the glory of Jesus, and be partner of his throne of Grace.

We thank God for his life and witness, his knowledge and his faith, and for us having known him.

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### WEEK 3: 15<sup>th</sup> February:

#### **“I have looked into Hell”: Josephine Butler, Rescuer of “Fallen” Women**

**A Reflection by Karen Drayton, Local Preacher in the Hidden River Circuit**

**Scripture: John 8.7-11**

I don't know about you, but I love reading inspirational stories of Christian people who followed their faith with discipline and devotion, and addressed the injustices of the day with prayerful action. Often they are described as “ahead of their time” – but this is mainly because the problems continue to this day, often in a worse form. We often think our problems are becoming more complex, and we can't do anything about them, yet problems have always been complex, and human behaviour was always difficult to change.

One such pioneering woman was Josephine Butler, a vulnerable yet brave woman whose reputation as one of the outstanding figures of the nineteenth century is entirely deserved. These days the people best known are those who entertain us on TV, furthering their own career and lives. Too many of those whose

courage and sacrifice gave us the life and country we have today are being forgotten. In an attempt to redress this, I offer a short reflection of the life of Josephine, born Josephine Elizabeth Grey on April 13<sup>th</sup> 1828 into a politically active and deeply Christian family in Northumberland. She was the 7<sup>th</sup> of 10 children born to Hannah and John Grey. She grew up with a strong sense that faith should be lived through action, and often found the church itself hypocritical and ineffective in living out Jesus words. She married George Butler, a scholar and headmaster who strongly supported her work.

A turning point in Josephine's life came after the tragic fatal accident of her your daughter Eva at the age of 5, falling from the banisters. As she grieved painfully physically and mentally, she eventually decided to seek out those who were also suffering night and day with no solace. A Baptist minister encouraged her to visit the Brownlow Hill Workhouse in Liverpool, a huge place which took up to 5000 inmates, and which is now the site of the modern Catholic Cathedral. She was taken to the oakum sheds where the unpicked fibres of old rope were used for caulking boats, and the hard and degrading work was thought fit only for paupers or convicts.

It was the punishment for unmarried mothers or prostitutes, and as Josephine sat amongst these 300 hardened women (12 of them had killed their previous matron), and starts to pick the oakum with them. They laughed at her incompetency, and their laughter made them friends. And so began a life concerned with people whom society regarded as sinful, fallen, and beyond saving grace. Josephine started welcoming these strangers into her home, until it was overcrowded and she needed to create other Houses of Rest, for those with consumption and at the end of their lives, banished from society. She offered them shelter, education, and friendship rather than judgement and punishment.

Just as Jesus offered grace to the woman caught in adultery in the scripture passage – and shouted “Go and sin no more !!” to the retreating backs of the men? – so we can learn to suspend judgement on others, and realise our own culpability in being unloving and complicit in many of the ills of others’ lives. By being apathetic, smug at our supposed elevated goodness and behaviour despite knowing our life’s circumstances have enabled us a better start, or better choices. I find it is always good to remember “There but for fortune, go you or I” as the Phil Ochs song goes.

As she campaigned for improvements to the lives of women, and especially prostitutes, Josephine once commented “I have looked into Hell”. Some things she saw during her work with prostitutes in the slums of Liverpool, Brussels and Paris are still shocking today – especially the examinations by the physicians of the day with tools of torture in the name of science. Physically very frail, Josephine brought almost superhuman energy (the Holy Spirit?) to her often dangerous campaigning work, travelling great distances, swaying huge crowds with her speeches (unusual and controversial for a woman of her time) and writing fiery and effective material. She was largely responsible for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1886, which had subjected many women to painful, internal, humiliating examinations, leaving men untouched by shame or physical distress. Josephine saw these laws as a moral outrage, hypocritical and a violation of human dignity. Despite ridicule and physical attacks, she continued with courage, and also managed to raise the age of consent for girls from 13-16, and was prominent in the campaign for equal education, which led to the establishment of university education for women.

There is a stained glass window dedicated to the life and work of Josephine Butler in the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, which I saw several times, but it was only when my younger son went to Durham University and joined the Josephine Butler College that I became interested in learning more about this remarkable woman. Josephine’s legacy is that of a woman who combined deep Christian faith with radical social action. She believed that every person, no matter how broken or despised, bore the image of God and deserved respect and hope. Like Christ, she lived her life among those on the margins of society. Her work internationally against human trafficking continues today with equal difficulty, by many organisations. Her desire to treat prostitutes with respect and offer them hospitality and hope is reflected in few

organisations in the UK. One such is Azalea, an organisation started by Christians in Luton. They went out at night taking cakes and sustenance to the prostitutes on the streets late at night, making conversation, starting friendships and inviting them to a safe house if they wanted to use it – a place for rest, for being pampered, loved unconditionally, and maybe experiencing unconditional love for the first time in their lives. Azalea in Greek means beautiful and dignified, and this is how they wanted the women to feel. They take inspiration from Proverbs 31.25 ... “she is clothed with strength and dignity: she can laugh at the days to come”. And in ground breaking work, Azalea also offers men a chance to rethink their behaviour, and change their attitudes and expectations.

So what does reflecting on the lives of inspiring figures of the past and present do for us?

Do we feel inadequate and humble for all we take for granted?

Do we resolve to work harder for justice and equality?

I resolve to pray more diligently, to ask God to give us more opportunities to serve Her, and the eyes to recognise these opportunities for what they are, with all people we meet and come across.

I will always remember the story in Philip Yancey’s book “What’s so amazing about Grace?”. He invited a prostitute to church. She responds “Go to church? Why would I want to go to church? I already feel bad enough about myself”. We need to create churches with a reputation where people will want to come, to feel loved and included, and accepted by all. Let’s find people who feel bad about themselves, and show them God’s unconditional, amazing, indescribable love through our own actions.

Often the worst sin in the Bible seems to be judging others, resulting in us treating people differently. In this week when the world celebrates Valentine’s Day of Love, let us love each other, as God loves us. Freely, with grace, without condition, with understanding, without judgement.

A prayer by Lucy Berry

Dear God

No one is owned, except by You, who made us, loves us, owns us too.

And no one is made less than pure for what they have to endure.

And no one is loved less by you through what they have been forced to do.

For no one is no one to you, whatever life has brought them to.

And when they are freed to run to you, they’ll know

No one’s no one to you. Amen.

Let us pray for the work of Azalea as it expands into Bedford, and for other organisations doing the same kind of work, bringing humanity and hope to those who are lost.

**Hymn: 672 Tune Epiphany (Brightest and Best) by Allan Charles Dickinson**

1. Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?

We want to serve you, to answer your call.

Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?

What should we do in our service to all?

2. Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;

Go where the farmlands are empty and bare.

I broke the bread for the people around me;

Out of my plenty, think what you can share.

3. Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;

4. Go to the outcast, to those who have no one;

Go where my people sleep out in the rain.

Go where my sheep are rejected and lost.

I had no comforts but what others gave me;

I dined with sinners and reached out to the lepers;

Offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.

Go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.

5. Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?

We are your servants who answer your call.

You go before us, and there we will follow,

Taking our cross in the service of all.

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## **Week 4: 22<sup>nd</sup> February: Is Jesus “learning” too?**

### **A Reflection by Peter Box, Local Preacher in the Hidden River Circuit**

#### **Scripture:Matthew ch 15 v 21 to 28 and Mark ch 7 v 24 to 30**

Methodism, along with many other denominations takes a very serious view of what is usually called “the social gospel”. Meaning to say we try to focus on Equality, Diversity Inclusion, (EDI) which is another way of saying that we are concerned for the “wellbeing of all”. We strive to ensure peace reigns throughout all human societies.

Which brings me to the consideration of this healing miracle to be found in Matthew and Mark. A mother pleading for the release of her daughter from the grip of an evil spirit. The woman at the centre of this miracle story, according to which translation you read is described as, Greek, Canaanite, Syrophoenician, Syrian or Gentile. One that, by most Jews should be regarded as an “Outsider”, an Alien, somebody of unworthy birth or character. And yet Jesus frees her daughter of an evil spirit. The marvellous thing here is that the healing took place at a distance, by remote control one might say. What else but a story to gladden our hearts and give rise to thanks and praise.

However, over many years and many times of re-reading these verses I have been troubled. Upon the first encounter with Jesus He refuses to speak, no answer is offered to her appeal. Even worse the disciples make it clear that the woman should be thought of as a pest to be sent away. As a desperate mother she persists, falling at Jesus’ feet and restating her case.

At this point Jesus tells her that his first calling is to the lost sheep of Israel!! The partiality is striking, even cutting. On the face of it the historic prejudice of Jews against Canaanites (reference The Parable of The Good Samaritan) comes straight out. Why would the saviour of the world, an advocate of love and compassion speak in such a way?

The reference to “dogs” is worth unpicking. In modern Western Countries Dogs are a favourite pet. It is true that a few of them cause trouble for people but there are millions that are loved. Indeed very many useful social functions such as companionship, assistance with physical disabilities and others that are “working” alongside law enforcement officers to name but a few roles of how it is that we value dogs. Interestingly those shepherds that went to seek out the baby Jesus did not have dogs and where the word “dog” comes in scripture it usually signifies something or someone as derogatory.

For Jews dogs are an unclean animal and there are quite a number of passages that underline this. Sinners continually relapsing, making the same mistake over and over again are referred to in a metaphor to be found at Proverbs ch26 v 11 “Dogs always return to their own vomit”. In the law of Moses we have Deuteronomy ch 23 v 18 This is a sanction concerning immoral earnings and not bringing them into The House of The Lord. St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians ch 3 talks about “false disciples that try to earn money in sordid unholy ways labelling them “dogs”.

Returning to Jesus’ conversation with the scorned mother, it would seem that there was no help available for the demon possessed child from Him. “Is it right to throw the children’s bread to the dogs?” Children of Abraham that is, and the dogs being the rest of us!! “But surely the dogs may eat the crumbs that fall from the children’s table” was the riposte. A question here might be, “what could a gentile expect to get from a Jewish Messiah”? The thought of Messianic power clearly came into the mix as the expression “Son of David” was used. The historic racial tensions were also at play, as the writer Matthew, throughout his Gospel tends to be pro Jewish, Canaanites being long standing adversaries of the Jews. Was it the case that from the cold printed text we are missing irony, even a bit of playfulness in Jesus’ tone? On the other hand are we seeing here that even our divine saviour is “learning” from His life experience?

The language used by Jesus was harsh to say the least. And yet this gentile woman in her persistence seems to perceive God’s plan of salvation for all the world. Going back to the promise made to Abraham that his offspring would inhabit all the world, the development through the prophets of the working out of salvation this faithful woman was here claiming a portion of the promise. Jesus recognised her faith, did not begrudge any crumbs and rewarded her with a word of healing for her daughter.

It has been said that this episode in a gentile land was in itself part of Jesus’ own spiritual development. If we accept His divinity this cannot be true although there are important lessons here for Jesus’ followers. Was it that the original author misquoted Jesus? Well we have two very similar accounts which suggests that the words used are honestly reported. Like much else in scripture there is much to ponder on in this encounter. We might care to quote Shakespeare in saying “all’s well that ends well”, the daughter was healed. Or is it, do we think that the business of racial prejudice was properly dealt with here? Throughout the public ministry of Jesus we are told of people being relieved of infirmities without any partiality except that they should use the gift of restoration to follow the ways of righteousness.

In the story that is being considered here the added dimension of racial prejudice is brought into focus. Is it that we are meant to feel the humiliations, insults, rudeness and ignorance meted out too often, not just in Jesus’ day but down the ages to the present? EDI is our Christian attempt to face up to such issues. Lets hope and pray that we make a good job of it.

The recently adopted “Singing The Faith” has much referring to social justice. One hymn that immediately springs to mind is number 409 by Marty Haugen

1. Let us build a house where Love may dwell

And all can safely live.

A place where saints and children tell

How hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

Rock of faith and vault of grace;

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

***All are welcome,***

***All are welcome,***

***All are welcome in this place.***

2. Let us build a house where prophets  
speak

And words are strong and true  
Where all God's children dare to seek  
To dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
And as symbol of God's grace;  
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome in this place.***

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach

Beyond the wood and stone  
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live  
the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
Bear the image of God's face;  
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome in this place.***

3. Let us build a house where love is found

In water, wine and wheat:  
A banquet hall on holy ground  
Where peace and justice meet  
Here the love of God through Jesus,  
Is revealed in time and space:  
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome in this place.***

5. Let us build a house where all are named,

Their songs and visions heard  
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
As words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome,***  
***All are welcome in this place.***

And with these words in our hearts we pray;  
Loving, almighty, redeeming God,  
You that has shown us that barriers between people make for trouble:  
Guide us to work for justice, peace and harmony,  
Beginning by sharing the Gospel message of salvation and then  
Sharing all that we have and are. Amen.



