



DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
12 MAY – 19 MAY 2013

DAY 6—FRIDAY 17 MAY

“Walking beyond barriers”

Scripture Readings

Ruth 4.13-18	The offspring of Ruth and Boaz
Psalms 113	God the helper of the needy
Ephesians 2.13-16	Christ has broken down the dividing wall between us
Matthew 15.21-28	Jesus and the Canaanite woman

“Walking beyond barriers”

Walking with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. The biblical readings today look at various ways in which human barriers are overcome, culminating in St Paul’s teaching that “You who are many were baptized into Christ and have clothed yourselves with Christ. So there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”. (Gal. 3: 27-28)

Commentary:

To walk humbly with God means walking beyond barriers that divide and damage the children of God. Christians in India are aware of the divisions among themselves. The treatment of Dalits within the churches and between them is a church-dividing issue that betrays the biblical vision of that unity for which we pray this week. St Paul lived with the devastating divisions in the earliest Christian community between Gentile and Jewish Christians. To this barrier and to every subsequent one, Paul proclaims that Christ “is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall between us.” Elsewhere Paul writes: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.27-28). In Christ, all the deep barriers of the ancient world, and their modern successors, have been removed, because on the Cross Jesus created in himself one new humanity.

In a world in which religious barriers are often difficult to cross, Christians who are a tiny minority in the multi-religious context of India remind us of the importance of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Matthew’s Gospel tells of the difficult journey for Jesus, and his disciples, to cross the barriers of religion, culture and gender when he is confronted by a Canaanite woman who pleads with Jesus to cure her daughter. The disciples’ visceral instinct to send her away and Jesus’ own hesitation are overcome by her faith, and by her need. From hence Jesus and his disciples were able to cross the imposed human barriers and boundaries of the ancient world.

Such is already present in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Ruth, the story of a Moabite woman of a different culture and religion, concludes with a list of her offspring with her Israelite husband, Boaz. Their child Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. The ancestry of the hero-King of ancient Israel reflects the fact that God’s will may be fulfilled when people cross the barriers of religion and culture. The walk with God today requires that we cross the barriers that separate Christians from one another and from people of other faiths. The walk towards Christian unity requires walking humbly with God beyond the barriers that separate us from one another.

Questions for reflection/discussion

1. What are the barriers that separate Christians in your community? What are the things that unite Christians in your community? When and how do Christians in your community meet, worship, celebrate and act together?
2. On what social issues are Christians united in Australia? How, when and why do Christian leaders speak out in public together? How is this reported in the media?
3. What are the barriers that separate Christians from other religious traditions in your community?
4. What are the differences and similarities between walking beyond the barriers that separate Christians from one another, and walking beyond those between Christianity and other religions?

Prayer for the Day: Gracious God, forgive us for the barriers of greed, prejudice, and contempt that we continually build, which separate us within and between churches, from people of other faiths, and from those we consider to be less important than us. May your Spirit give us courage to cross these boundaries, and to tear down the walls that disconnect us from each other. Then with Christ may we step forth into unknown terrain, to carry his message of loving acceptance and unity to all the world. God of life, lead us to justice and peace. Amen.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Faith and Unity Commission