

1st November 2020 10 am The Heart of Jesus for the Bereaved and the Sick

Service led by Val Whiteman, Talk by Jenny Matthews, "What Jesus Means to Me" by Phil Swards, Interview by Andrew Attwood with Ruth Coomber.

This transcript is only of "What Jesus Means to Me", the interview and the main talk.

What Jesus Means to Me.....	1
Andrew Attwood interviews Ruth Coomber.....	1
Reading: Luke 7:1-17.....	3
Talk.....	4
Prayerful response.....	8

What Jesus Means to Me

[Val Whiteman:]

Now we have a video, which is part of a series about what God means to people in our congregation. And we're going to listen to what Phil Swards says about what Jesus means to him.

[Phil Swards:]

We all have to make a decision about Jesus Christ at some time in our life.

But if the claims He made about Himself are true, if He was the Son of God, if He came to live on this earth, if He died on the Cross, and if He rose from the dead, and if by dying on the Cross, He paid the penalty for our sinful nature and all the things that we've done wrong, all the things that separate us from God, if that is true, then that changes everything, because it means that we have a restored relationship with God, a relationship which starts now and continues until eternity in the next life. Now, my relationship with God is far from perfect, it's very rough-and-ready, rather like this unfinished room I'm sitting in at the moment, but in the next life, it will be finished, it will be complete.

John, in his gospel, chapter 14, tells us that there is a place reserved in heaven for everybody who believes in Jesus Christ. And for me, that's a tremendous certainty in a very uncertain world, particularly at the moment.

[Val:]

We've heard what Jesus means to Phil: that certainty in an uncertain world. So for a moment, think about what Jesus means to you.

Andrew Attwood interviews Ruth Coomber

Now we're going to listen to another video clip, and this time, it's with Ruth Coomber.

It's an our series about how people experience God in their daily lives. It really fits with the theme of Jesus's heart for the sick and the bereaved. So let's listen to Ruth.

[Andrew:] Hi, Ruth. It's good to see you. Hope you're well?

[Ruth:] Well, yeah, not too bad, thank you.

[Andrew:] Good. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Tell me who you are. Tell me something about yourself.

[Ruth:] Okay. And so my name is Ruth. I am 25, one of the few 20s-30s at St. John's. And I got married about a month ago, so very much enjoying the

honeymoon phase of married life. I recently qualified as a doctor. So I finished med school in June/July, and started working in Coventry Hospital in August.

[Andrew:] Great, good. That's a lot of stuff to be doing in these last weeks. So it's good to hear about that. I wanted to ask you this question then: it's, you have a slightly different routine to most normal people. What will you be doing this coming weekend?

[Ruth:] So unfortunately, I won't be joining everyone on YouTube at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. I will be in the throes of A&E chaos. I have a couple of weekend shifts this weekend, so I will be doing Saturday and Sunday at the hospital. A mixture of ward rounds and then the admissions - should be a varied day.

[Andrew:] Okay. And how's that going at the moment?

[Ruth:] Um, I, so I've just come off the back of three long days in A&E Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and it's been chaos. It's the never-ending struggle of there aren't enough beds in the hospital for all the sick people who are coming in and deadlines for people to meet and the stress of clashing teams within the hospital team. Yeah, it makes for an interesting day. Rather a tiring one.

[Andrew:] OK, so given that we're asking Christians about where faith fits into work, where do you see God in your working life in your pattern of employment?

[Ruth:] Um, the NHS does a pretty good job of trying to avoid faith unless it's around, surrounding patients. I think the only time I've heard faith mentioned is towards the end of patients' lives, when we stop to consider what kind of needs we need to meet for them. And that's generally the only time that patients' spiritual or, I suppose, religious wishes come into play.

In terms of NHS staff, it's not really something that I hear talked about very often. But I think you can see God in the everyday within the interactions that people have and the kind of moments of humanity, and also, every now and then when you're looking at a particular scan, or you have that kind of moment of realisation, just how incredible the human body is, moments that I'm particularly reminded just how incredible our Creator is.

[Andrew:] Yeah. Okay. And in what ways do you think God helps you personally, in your work context?

[Ruth:] [laughs] He's very good at giving me the energy to keep going. And, I think, patience with my colleagues, patience with my patients sometimes. And with myself. There is many a situation when I find myself saying, "God, I am not equipped to deal with this. And I really need you to help me right now. Because this is well above my head."

[Andrew:] Okay.

[Ruth:] Yeah. A lot of sink-or-swim as a junior doctor. So, just lots of kind-of arrow prayers of, "God, please help me right now. I really need your help."

[Andrew:] Yeah, brilliant. Thank you. So what, what could I pray for today, what would be a good prayer to pray for you in this particular phase of life at the moment?

[Ruth:] Um, I think interactions with other people. When everyone's stressed or tired, it's really easy for people to get snappy with each other. And I think that just has a whole knock-on effect on the wider team around you in the workplace environment that you're in. And actually the difference that it makes when people kind-of take a breath, and that's something that I know I really struggle with, as I can occasionally be like, "Not now, I'm busy!!" when actually it would be much more productive to just be more gracious in our dealings with our colleagues. So I think, yeah, that's the main thing that I try and ask God to remind me to do on a regular basis, to be gracious with my colleagues. You never know who's having a worse day than me.

[Andrew:] Absolutely. Okay. Well, let me just pray for you. Thank You, Ruth.

Lord Jesus, we want to thank You for Ruth and her new role in this medical profession. Lord, there are clearly an awful lot of pressures and stresses, but we thank You for her learning, we thank You, Lord, for her continued learning and development in this early phase of her career. And we pray, Lord Jesus, for good relationships between herself and colleagues and patients. We pray, Lord Jesus, for Your grace. We pray, Lord Jesus, for moments to breathe, and that she would continue to lean on You during her working day and including when she gets home and needs to rest. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Thank you so much, Ruth.

[Ruth:] Thank you!

[Val:] Thank you, Andrew and Ruth. Wasn't that amazing? I remember when our Ruth was junior doctor and how difficult she found it, having so much responsibility, so much to do. And the role that she was playing was slightly uncertain. So we pray for Ruth, please continue to pray for Ruth and for all our doctors because they're really not superhuman, they're really just like us, and they need all the prayer and help that they can get.

Reading: Luke 7:1-17

So now Jenny's going to come to speak to us I'd like to pray for her before she starts.

Father God, I pray that as Jenny speaks her words may be of You and that You will bless them to us for Your Son's sake. Amen.

So over to Jenny.

[Jenny:] Thank you.

[Kim:] I think I'm going to read before Jenny speaks to us. So our reading this morning is taken from Luke 7, verses 1 to 17.

1 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. **3** The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. **4** When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, **5** because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." **6** So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. **7** That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. **8** For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it."

9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." **10** Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

11 Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. **12** As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. **13** When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Talk

[Jenny:]

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Jennifer Matthews and I'm a member of the congregation here at St. John's.

I wonder where it is that you would like to be able to travel to - there are no travel restrictions. Do you like being in a busy place in a big city with lots going on? Or is your preference for a quieter place? Somewhere more out of the way or remote? Or perhaps your choice would depend on actually how long you could stay in the place and who you were going with? Personally, I enjoy visiting cities for just a few days, but it's out in the countryside that I feel most at home and at peace. When I was down in Devon, Mum said, what did I want to do? Or where did I want to go? And I wanted to go up to Dartmoor and see the moorland and be in the middle of nowhere and to see the sea and to hear the waves crashing on the beach.

You might be wondering what this has to do with today's reading. Well, as we explore the Bible passage together, we're going to go on a journey to a very busy town, to Capernaum, and to an off-the-beaten-track place, a much smaller place, Nain. It will probably be helpful to you to have the Bible passage open in front of you so you can follow along. So just a reminder, it's in Luke, chapter 7, verses 1 to 17. It begins in Capernaum, which is situated on the Sea of Galilee. It was a really significant place and Jesus used Capernaum as a base for His ministry. If you have a quick flick through the gospels, you will see that Capernaum gets mentioned lots and lots of times. Earlier in Luke in chapter 4, it records that Jesus preached in the synagogue at Capernaum, and it was the home town for some of His disciples. Levi (also known as Matthew the tax collector) came from Capernaum, Simon Peter was at home there too. And in chapter 4 in Luke, we met how Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever.

Capernaum was also a really significant place to the Romans. They had a posting there with soldiers to keep the Roman Empire in check. This is where one of our characters for today comes in. We meet a Roman centurion. A centurion was a highly trained soldier. He would be a fighter, and knew exactly how to follow orders. Life was tough for any soldier who disobeyed orders, with crucifixion being a Roman punishment. And a centurion was a soldier with approximately 100 soldiers under his command.

Now the Romans and the Jews did not get along very well together. For one thing, Romans were Gentiles, and there were plenty of commands about Jews not mixing with the Gentiles. Secondly, the Romans were an occupying force. So in verse 3 we come across our first big surprise in this passage. It says the centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him, asking Him to come and heal his servant. We have discovered that this Roman centurion has a gentle side to him as well as being a soldier. He is sensitive to the plight of his servant, a trusted and valued servant, who was sick and about to die.

Reading on we discover that this centurion, posted from his home country to the region of Galilee, has had the insight to find out about the Jewish people. And in so doing, he loves the nation (it says in verse 5) and has become a follower of God, showing his commitment by helping to fund the building of the synagogue. He has built friends within the Jewish community.

So it is the Jewish leaders that go to meet Jesus and pleads that he helps a Gentile. It's a pretty amazing situation. You might also note here that the Jewish elders are actually on the same side as Jesus, and are not trying to find fault with Him here, unlike some of the other passages we read about the Pharisees.

When I first read this passage, thinking about it for today, it brought to mind the healing of another Gentile soldier by a Jewish prophet in the Old Testament. Some of you may recall the story in 2 Kings chapter 5 of Naaman, who had leprosy. Naaman was another foreign soldier. He was a commander in the army of King Aram. And it was his servant girl, a Jewish servant girl who had been taken captive, who told Naaman about the Jewish prophet Elisha and his ability to heal through God. When Naaman goes to visit Elisha, he doesn't get to see the Prophet himself, but gets given directions to wash in the river Jordan seven times. Naaman was pretty disgruntled about this, but with persuasion he followed the instructions and was healed of his skin disease, a Gentile being healed by God through a Jewish prophet.

Back to today's story. The Jewish elders approached Jesus and asked Him to go to the centurion's house. But before they get there, the centurion sends friends to stop Jesus. Maybe the centurion was aware that if Jesus, being a Jew, should enter a Gentile's home, then there were strict rules that the Jews were expected to follow in order to cleanse themselves. So instead of the centurion meeting with Jesus, his friends pass on a message to Jesus, "Lord, don't trouble yourself. I do not deserve to have you to come into my roof. This is why I did not consider myself worthy to come to you. Say the word and my servant will be healed."

By calling Jesus 'Lord', the centurion shows how he has recognised the power of God in Jesus. The confidence that the centurion has in Jesus being able to heal his servant is absolutely total. There is no doubt. He believes in Jesus. In verse 9, we read that "When Jesus heard this He was amazed (or marvelled) at him." It's not often that we read that Jesus was amazed by someone's faith, and that this someone was a Gentile. Jesus says, "I have not found such great faith, even in Israel."

Jesus does heal the centurion's servant, showing the crowd and all around the power of God at work through Him. This is not Jesus' first healing miracle. What this healing miracle shows is that Jesus heals both Jews and Gentiles. His ministry may be directed to the Jews as God's chosen people, but it's not exclusively for the Jews. Jesus has the power to heal **all** people.

When pondering on this passage, I realised that there were lots of people involved in order for the servant to be healed, not just the centurion, whose servant is healed, but the local Jewish leaders and the centurion's friends. A few weeks ago, when Michelle was speaking, she reminded us that we all have a role to play in bringing people to Jesus. One of the Bible verses she shared was 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 6, where Paul writes,

3 "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

This passage made me consider more about the role we have in our intercessory prayers. God has the power to heal, but He wants us to be involved. I think that God has the power to heal, but He wants us to be involved. Yes, that includes ordinary people like you and me, each of us has a part to play. Now, I'm not

great at playing for others. I do pray for others, but I'm often not that specific about what their needs are. And sometimes I'm seriously lacking in faith that my prayers are worthwhile. That might seem a dreadful thing to say, but I see other people who seem so much more eloquent than me and others who are so much more in tune with other people's needs.

You see, often I'm not very good at seeing even the most obvious things around, you can ask any of my family about this. So when I come home from school, I usually inspect the front garden and see how the courgette plants are doing, and have a general inspection of the garden. So when I came in the other week, and Kim said, "Oh, do you like what I did at lunchtime?" I had to confess that I had not spotted that he'd cut down our sunflower plants that had all died and gone over. And they were huge plants and took up a big space. So I did miss the obvious. If you ask Bethany about me looking for my glasses in the morning, or where I've left my cup of tea, she could tell you some really funny stories about what I don't see.

So I've diverged from the point: when praying for others, I find it hard and feel uncertain what to say. Some people are really very good at seeing the needs of others, and others of us are not so good at this. But this doesn't really matter. Having a go and saying a prayer for others is what really matters, and it can be really short.

I'd like to tell you a little story about one of my very short prayers. I work in Barford primary school, and Barford is a little village, the other side of Warwick, and I walk around it quite a lot and use different places as prayer pointers. There's a place near the allotments where I see fields of sheep, and that reminds me of my friend Ruth-Abigail from Devon and I pray for her. And apparently, I'm digressing again. As I drive into Barford, I go along Bridge Street, and I pass the house of a former colleague. She had had a tough year in school with ill health and stress, and I had been in the habit of praying for her every morning as I passed her house. She then moved jobs, and I'd got out of the habit of praying for Angela. One morning, I felt I had a real sense that I should pray for her. And then another part of me said, "Well, what's the point? You'll never know the answer to that prayer." So despite those thoughts, I sent up a short prayer for Angela and her new job. I then parked my car and had my usual five-minute walk along Church Street into school. And it was there that an amazing thing happened. Angela was driving along Church Street, which is not the direction she should have been going if she was going from her house to her new school that she was working at. She spotted me, stopped her car, pulled down her window to talk to me. It was really good to see her again and to find out how she was doing. I told her that I prayed for her just a few minutes earlier, and that I had NOT been expecting God to answer my prayer so immediately, and that I would find out how she was doing. Our conversation ended. What I hadn't expected was that Angela too was amazed by how quickly God had answered my prayer for her. She told a friend of hers, Joyce, who worked at my school. Joyce in turn then came to see me and asked me to tell her the story about God answering prayers. I was amazed. Even with my tiny little bit of faith, God was able to do something incredible.

Now, I would like to turn our focus to the second story in this passage from Luke. This is a story that, when I read it, I thought, "I don't remember reading this before." And it's really touched me. Jesus has left Capernaum and travelled about 25 miles southwards to a much smaller place, Nain. With Him He has His disciples and a large crowd following too (verse 11). If you don't remember hearing about Nain before, then you are probably like me. Now as far as I can work out Nain only features once in the Bible. It's a much smaller place than Capernaum. Nain has just one gateway into the town. That tells you a bit about its size. It's a little place, an out-of-the-way place. Why was Jesus going there, taking His disciples, and a crowd too, with Him? Why go to Nain? I don't know how much you know about the burial customs of the Jews at that time. When a

Jew died, within just a few hours, the dead person was carried on a stretcher out of the town for burial. Behind would be the people carrying the dead person, there'd be the dead person's family, their friends too, and it was customary that anybody meeting a funeral procession would stop what they were doing and would join the procession. So the crowd following would gradually become larger and larger.

So here we are in the little town of Nain, there's a funeral procession coming out through the town gate, and Jesus and His large crowd meet the procession going in the opposite direction. So who is it that has died? Verse 12 tells us the dead person is the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Now let us turn our thoughts to this widow. She has already had the death of her husband. From my limited understanding, a widow would live in the house of her son and her son would take care of her. So this woman has been through bereavement once before, following the death of her husband. We can imagine that her son has supported her in her grief and provided a home for his mother. Her son would have walked beside her as she buried her father. Perhaps her son looked like his father, and reminded her of her husband. Now she's in an even worse situation: her only son has died. He was the only one who took care of her. As she walked behind his body being carried out to the town for burial, she was crying. She was in pain, heart-broken. Her life has been turned upside down for a second time. I suspect that the pain from the death of her husband was very real again.

As a family I can partly sympathise with her grief. Back in the summer, Kim's Mum passed away. Even though we knew she was dying, it didn't lessen the pain that we felt, each felt when she had died. We had her funeral at the crematorium with just 30 people in attendance. Only 18 months ago, we've been in the same crematorium for Kim's Dad's funeral. That time the chapel was packed with people: standing room only. At his Mum's funeral, we were all thinking back to his Dad too. A second death made us remember our first loss too. It was all very real.

Going back to the widow's story, her loss this time is her only son. A parent never expects to be at the funeral of their child. It seems all wrong, the wrong order that a younger person should be dead. It is here, in her first hours of grief, full of sorrow and in deep need, that Jesus meets her. In verse 13, we read that Jesus' heart went out to the widow. He was full of compassion. Jesus greets her with the instruction, "Don't cry." This probably seems the most ridiculous thing to say. This is a woman who has lost her husband and now her only son is dead. And Jesus tells her not to cry! Then, in front of the two large crowds, His followers and the crowd of mourners, Jesus performs a miracle. He says to the dead man,

"Young man, I say to you, get up!" **15** The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

Can you imagine this scene, this complete change-about from sorrow to joy, from death to life? Jesus brought to life to this darkest situation. He gave hope, He restored the broken-hearted. It was incredible. No wonder that the crowds were both filled with awe and praised God. Two lives had been completely changed and transformed. The widow had her son back alive again, her only son was no longer dead, but alive again.

If you are familiar with Elisha, then you may recall that Elisha brought the only son of a Shunammite woman back to life again. This story is again in 2 Kings chapter 4, just before the story of Elisha and the healing of Naaman. In summary, this woman from Shunem followed God, she had gone to the trouble to persuade her husband that they should build an extra room on the roof of their house, so that Elisha could use it whenever he was in the area. And in her old age, God had given this woman a son, and then in the son's youth, he has a headache and dies. This Shunammite woman immediately seeks Elisha as a man of

God to save her son and bring him back to life. Which is exactly what happens. So where is Shunem? It's just a few miles away from Nain! So when the crowd declares in verse 16, "a great prophet has appeared among us," they're probably remembering what Elisha had done. They had heard the story of Elisha bringing a dead boy alive again in Shunem. And now this very day, two crowds have seen Jesus display the power of God over death, and bring a young man in Nain back to life. No wonder that the crowds were filled with awe and praised God.

Another thing you may notice from these stories, is that it is the only son who was dead and became alive. This is significant and points us forward to Jesus. Jesus is God's only Son, and He died on the Cross. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus has the power to heal. And even more than that, Jesus has power over death. Later on, the disciples will see Jesus has power over creation when He calms the storm and His disciples say, "Who is this that even the winds and the seas obey Him?" There is power in the name of Jesus.

In John chapter 11, verses 25 and 26, Jesus said, [NIV 2011]

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;
26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."

Earlier I asked the question, why was Jesus going to Nain? I believe in God-incidences and not coincidences I think it was no coincidence that Jesus was going to Nain just when a funeral was happening. I believe He was going there to meet that widow. He was going to meet her at her deepest crisis, in her time of real need. I take real hope from this, that it wasn't the widow going to seek Jesus, as it had been for the Shunammite woman and Elisha, Jesus came to meet her. This shows us that Jesus is with us too. He meets us in our needs, whatever our needs, and we're wherever we are. Psalm 34, verse 18, declares,

The LORD is close to the broken-hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Jesus will even visit a little unknown place such as Nain, to meet a grieving widow in need. Even when we are not seeking Him, He will come and find us. Let us praise the Lord too, just as the people of Nain did.

I offer you two things to learn from this passage in Luke:

- First, pray for others, to bring people to Jesus in prayer, just as the centurion brought his servant to Jesus for healing.
- And secondly, to remember that Jesus meets us right where we are, even at our times of greatest sadness and need, Jesus meets us. Jesus has a heart full of compassion, and His heart goes out to us.

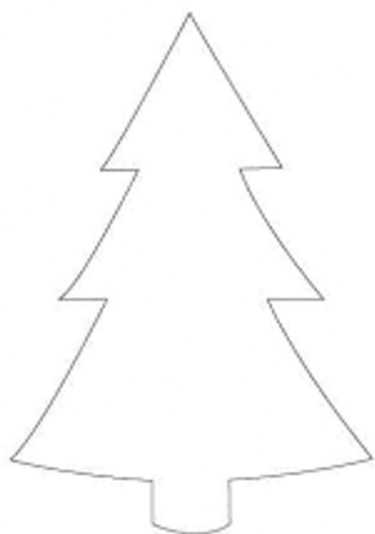
Amen.

[Val:]

Thank you, Jenny. Let's spend a moment thinking about what Jenny has said and the two things that she asked us to think about.

Prayerful response

I find (in common I imagine with a lot of people) I find it really challenging to pray for healing, for Jesus to come into situations. far too easily, It turns into a kind of a shopping list, a list of people that I know are ill and need my prayers, as it were. I wonder if now if you have the tree.



You could write on it the name of the person you will people that you thought about that you want to pray for. And I'd like to sort of challenge you, in the coming week, not to pray for them directly, but to hold them before God, to ask Him what



He would like for them, what His will is for them. So instead of rushing into "Dear God, heal so-and-so," and then leaving it to Him, as it were, to enter into the relationship with Him, of working with Him to heal, and to think about these people and their needs. So, just to be responsive to God rather than to jump in and say "God do this that and the other," which I have to say I do far too often. So, write down the names of the people, and then hold on to them before God rather than praying for anything for them. So I'm going to leave another time of quiet for you to do that before we go on to pray for other things.

[pause]

Father God, we know that Your will is for good for all who love You. Bless the people we've named before You and help us to learn to know what to pray for them.
Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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