

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
28 June - 04 July 2015

Thought for the Week:

The readings that have been set for this week are deeply challenging, but they go to the heart of the Gospel. In the Old Testament reading for this week, we see David's surprising response to the news that Saul, the king of Israel, and his son, Jonathan, have both died. David's grief over Jonathan is understandable - they were very close friends - but Saul had become his enemy and had tried on many occasions to kill him. David's grief over his enemy, and the love it reveals, is a challenging reflection of the Gospel call to be people of forgiveness and love for our enemies.

In the Gospel we see Jesus serving two very different people. In the first case he is secretly touched by a woman who has been struggling with vaginal bleeding for twelve years. This means that she had been "unclean" and unable to worship for all that time, and anything she touched also became unclean. That's why she tries to hide what she's done - legally she has defiled Jesus! But, Jesus insists that she show herself to ensure that everyone knows that she is now clean. Then, in his "unclean" state, Jesus goes to the home of the synagogue leader, Jairus, and raises his dead daughter. Poor and excluded, and rich and included - Jesus helps them both. Notice also that they both had much to lose by accepting Jesus' compassion. Jairus could have lost his position in the synagogue, and the woman could have ended up in real trouble if Jesus or the crowd had become angry. But, both, by being willing to risk being served, are healed.

Imagine, for a moment, what the world would be like if we each adopted these inclusive, gracious attitudes - even if only with those in our immediate vicinity! This is the challenge we face this week.

Sunday 28 June 2015

Reading: Mark 5:21-43

Reflection: In today's reading we discover that Jesus has a very different way of being in the world. To begin with, he seems to feel no time pressure or peer pressure. Although he has been told the little girl is dying, he still stops when he feels the woman touch him. In spite of his disciples' frustration, he insists that she show herself. He does this so that she is healed but also - by showing everyone that she is clean - included again. Imagine, Jairus' frustration, though, as this is happening. Imagine his anger when he hears that his daughter has died while they were dealing with this unclean woman. But, Jesus is unperturbed by the ticking of the clock even though it means he doesn't get to the little girl in time to stop her dying. Somehow Jesus knows that with God there is always time to serve, to care and to heal.

It's easy for us to get so caught up in the urgent that we forget what is really important. It's easy to become so pressured by all the tasks we need to accomplish that we forget to be really present and available to the people who need us. This is why the psychologist Carl Jung is reported to have said, "Hurry is not of the devil. It is the devil." When we allow time or other people to pressure us, we inevitably exclude those that we consider less important. When we are under pressure, we lose the capacity to be gracious and understanding. When we focus only on what is urgent we easily lose sight of God's calling for us and we lose our souls on the treadmill of our busyness.

Where is time-pressure or peer-pressure leading you away from compassion and care? How can you slow down and focus on people and on what's really important?

Practice for Today: The practice of listening always slows us down and refocuses us. This is why we always have moments of listening - to Scripture or to the sermon - in worship. Today, take time to listen to the promptings in your own heart, and to the genuine needs of people around you, and allow what you hear to lead you into compassion and care.

Breath-Prayer for Today: My ears are open, O God, to hear and respond to you and to the needs of others.

Monday 29 June 2015

Reading: 1 Samuel 23:14-18

Reflection: If there was any doubt in your mind that Saul wanted David dead, today's reading makes it abundantly clear. David had given up his home and the peaceful life of a shepherd to become, first, a court musician for Saul, and then a general in his army. Now, he had lost everything because of Saul's jealousy and insanity, and was a fugitive living on the run just to stay alive. If anyone had a reason to celebrate Saul's death, it was David. But when Saul died, David grieved and honoured him, calling the entire nation to mourn as well. Somehow David had learned to love his enemy.

In a similar way, Jonathan, who should also have been jealous of David, since he was the heir to the throne, remained David's best friend. He loved David so much that he helped to guide and protect him against his own father. Both David and Jonathan reflect, in this instance, a Christ-likeness that is beautiful to see and challenging to apply to our own lives. But, there is no question that this is exactly what the Gospel calls us to do - to love both friends and enemies selflessly, graciously and humbly. Who needs you to love and forgive them like this today?

Practice for Today: It often seems naïve and stupid to speak about forgiveness and reconciliation, but the alternative - revenge or "balancing the scales" - is very destructive. The only way to avoid this damaging attitude in our lives is to practice confession regularly, asking for God's help and forgiveness whenever we struggle to forgive and love those who have hurt us.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Forgive me, O God, when I excuse my lack of love and seek revenge instead of love and forgiveness.

Tuesday 30 June 2015

Reading: Leviticus 15:19-31

Reflection: Today's reading is from the law that had condemned the poor woman with the flow of blood that was healed by Jesus. It can be tedious to read passages like these, but it can also be deeply challenging if we just lift these instructions out of the Bible and try to apply them directly to our lives. When we do this, the result is almost always the kind of exclusion and suffering that the woman who touched Jesus' garment had experienced. Jesus, though, refuses to let the law compel him to legalistic responses to people. As this passage shows, just by touching him, the woman had made Jesus unclean, but Jesus doesn't even address this. It's just not an issue for him. What he is concerned about is bringing about healing and reconciliation for this woman. He wants to make sure that both she and the onlookers know that there is no reason for her to be rejected any more (if there ever was a reason).

When we compare these Old Testament laws with the life of Jesus we cannot help but see the contrasts. This should lead us to an obvious conclusion - and it's one that the Bible affirms: There is a progression, an evolution, in how human beings understand God through the Bible. In the earliest parts of the Bible, the God we see is local, violent, unpredictable and very harsh. However, as we move through the ages of Scriptural revelation and writing, we see how people understand God more clearly. They start to recognise that God is the God of the entire universe, and that God seeks peace and justice for all. This progression reaches its climax in Jesus who boldly proclaims that he shows us what God is really like. It's a very different picture of God than the one Moses had when he recorded the law. Jesus reveals a God of grace and compassion, of inclusivity and welcome, of self-giving and forgiveness. The God revealed through Moses condemns this woman to a life of lonely isolation and rejection. The God revealed through Jesus heals her and welcomes her into community.

Which way God is most clearly revealed through your life?

Practice for Today: The act of worship always includes some kind of proclamation of the Gospel. Generally this happens through a sermon, but it doesn't end there. As we listen to this proclamation, we recognise that we, too, are called to proclaim the message and mission of Jesus. We don't have to be preachers to do this - we only need to let our lives speak of the grace and compassion of Christ. Today, try to do as many acts of grace as you can fit in.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May your grace and love be seen through my gracious actions, O God.

Wednesday 01 July 2015

Reading: Mark 9:14-29

Reflection: The Gospels are full of accounts that have lots of potential for confusion and misunderstanding. Even Jesus' explanations are so enigmatic that we are left scratching our heads - as were the disciples. Don't be fooled into thinking the Bible is supposed to be easy to understand. Rather, it's an invitation to wrestle with truth until it becomes part of us, and not just a bunch of ideas we carry in our heads. Today's reading is just such an account.

Jesus comes into the middle of an argument between his disciples and the religious leaders. The disciples had been unable to heal a boy who was being tormented by a destructive evil spirit. Jesus, sounding rather frustrated, challenges the lack of faith of all those involved and then heals the boy. When the disciples ask why they couldn't do it, Jesus responds that this "kind" of spirit can only be cast out by prayer (some other versions of this story include "and fasting"). Prayer, in the New Testament, is not so much about "saying prayers" as it is about living our lives in submission to God's Reign and seeking to bring God's will into being in our lives and our world. Faith is not about ideas so much as it is about orienting our entire lives around God's Reign. So, whatever else this passage may teach us, it is certainly saying that evil can only be overcome by those whose lives are oriented completely around God's Reign of justice, peace, goodness and love, and that it is only as we live to bring the values of God's Reign into the world that we can succeed in conquering evil.

How is your life helping to cast out evil today?

Practice for Today: Intercessory prayer, which is not just about speaking words, but is about expressing true compassion and justice in our lives as well as our words, is a powerful practice for confronting and casting out evil. Today, wherever you observe or encounter any kind of evil, commit to offering words and actions of intercession - of love and grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: O God, lead me in the life of faith and prayer that casts out all kinds of evil.

Thursday 02 July 2015

Reading: Jeremiah 7:1-15

Reflection: The people of Israel had come to view the Temple of God as some sort of magical talisman that would ensure their safety and prosperity. The prophet Jeremiah, however, proclaims that it is nothing of the sort. The only thing that can keep God's people from evil, he says, is to live lives of justice. This message resonates with yesterday's reflection in which Jesus called us to lives of prayer and faith in order to cast out evil. But, it goes further than this, too. On Sunday we will see that a life of following Christ is a life that is "sent" - that has a task to do in the world. Jeremiah indicates the same thing here today. God's people are called to work for justice, to care for the poor, the orphan, the widow and the foreigner. This is directly connected to God's original call to their ancestor Abraham - God's people are blessed to be a blessing. But, when they stop living to bless others, and become selfish and exploitative and unjust, they open themselves to evil and the result is very destructive.

It's tempting to view our faith and our prayer as "personal". We like to think it's just about "me and Jesus" and as long as I believe in the right ideas, and worship regularly, then I'm ok. The Scriptures challenge this view of faith very strongly. If our worship does not lead us to care for others and to work for justice in whatever way we can, however small, we have not really worshipped at all. Rather, as we seek to follow Jesus we need to remember his words - "As the Father sent me, so I'm sending you." (John 20:21).

How is God sending you to bring love and justice into your world today?

Practice for Today: We don't just fall into lives that reflect God's Reign. We need to make conscious commitments to follow Christ daily. That's why worship gatherings usually include a moment of dedication where we intentionally commit our lives to God's mission. Today, practice the discipline of dedication at the start of, and throughout, the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I dedicate myself again to your Reign of love and justice, O God.

Friday 03 July 2015

Reading: 2 Corinthians 10:7-11

Reflection: The Corinthian Church was a challenge to Paul. As we read his letters we discover that there were factions in conflict with one another. We discover that they had become so self-absorbed that they weren't sharing when they gathered together for meals, including communion. And they were even challenging Paul's credentials as an apostle, questioning whether he had any right to lead them.

One of the readings that is set for Sunday is Paul's statement that he will not boast about anything but the cross, and that he celebrates his weaknesses because in them God's strength is made perfect. Paul had no need to defend his ministry. As we see today, he was confident in God's calling and in the authority he had been given as an apostle (which means "sent one"). Paul was not arrogant, but he was no doormat either. He had confidence in his relationship with Christ, and in the task he had been given to do.

How can you find your confidence in Jesus and his calling today?

Practice for Today: When we focus on who Jesus is, we more easily rest in the confidence that comes from knowing Jesus. The practice of praise is a great way to do just that. Today, praise God for who you are in Jesus, and for God's call on your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Praise be to you, O God, for you have called me to be yours in Christ.

Saturday 04 July 2015

Reading: Matthew 8:18-22

Reflection: Sometimes God's call is hard, and we look for every reason we can

find to avoid it. Sometimes we think God's call is too easy and we sign up before we've really understood what God requires. Then, when it gets tough, we fall away. This is what Jesus was dealing with in today's reading.

The first person in today's reading is a religious leader who loudly and confidently proclaims that he will follow Jesus. But, Jesus makes it clear that following him is not something that can just be added on to this man's comfortable life and status. He will have to be willing to go to everyone who needs him. The second man tells Jesus he will follow once he's buried his father. This sounds reasonable until we realise that the father was either not yet dead, or he was dead, but the man wanted to follow the custom of returning after a year and "burying" the bones of the deceased person in a box placed into a slot in the wall. Either way, he was trying to put off his decision while sounding "spiritual".

Jesus promised abundant life, but to get there is often painful because it means giving up our own agendas and our self-absorption. We are all called to follow Jesus and to serve in some way, and it's only as we answer that call that life is found. But, the longer we try to just "add" Jesus to our lives, or put off the decision, the longer we keep ourselves from life.

Practice for Today: When the call of the Gospel is proclaimed as strongly as in today's reading there is only one thing to do: respond. One of the best responses is to re-order our priorities according to those of God's Reign. Try this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I hear you call, O God, and I choose to follow.

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