

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

05 - 11 July 2015

### **Thought for the Week:**

Two words come together in a very challenging way this week in the Lectionary readings. The Old Testament tells of David finally becoming king over all of God's people, and the Gospel tells of Jesus sending out his disciples. The first word we find here is "sent". As Jesus was sent, so he sends his disciples to preach the message of God's Reign and demonstrate God's grace and liberation, and David, the shepherd who is "sent" by God to become king, finally gets to fulfil his calling after many years. The second word is "dependence". Even though Jesus is rejected by his hometown, he still instructs his disciples to go out and depend on the people to whom they are being sent. They are to take nothing with them, but to trust in the generosity and hospitality of the people. David knew what this was like. If you read the story of his rise to the monarchy, you find him leaning very heavily on all sorts of people for provision, protection and assistance in all sorts of ways. The call of God always includes a call to humility and faith, which are both necessary for us to trust, and receive from, others. We never answer God's call alone, but always in partnership with those whom God calls to support and sustain us.

It is tempting, in our individualist world, to idolise our self-sufficiency and independence, but this is not the way of God's Reign. Rather, we are called to live and work in caring partnerships as we follow Jesus and serve one another. When we look at the problems that we face in the world today, it's hard to doubt that such partnerships are exactly what we need. This week we'll be exploring how to live as "sent ones" in partnership with others.

### **Sunday 05 July 2015**

**Reading:** Mark 6:1-13

**Reflection:** After watching Jesus get rejected by the people of his hometown, the disciples must have been pretty nervous about being sent out to preach and serve. But, then Jesus tells them to take nothing but a stick and some sandals! If they had thought that following Jesus would be glamorous and easy, they got a real wake up call! But, they were being sent to do exactly what they had heard and seen Jesus do - preach about God's Reign and show that it really had arrived by caring for the sick and liberating those oppressed by evil. The negative reaction by the people of his home did not stop Jesus fulfilling his calling, and he insisted that no negative reaction should be allowed to stop his disciples in their ministries either. When people were not open to his message, Jesus just moved on - and he instructed the disciples to work the same way. There was no need to waste time and energy on trying to persuade or force people to believe.

But, then he also told his disciples to accept being served by others. They were to receive hospitality and food from those to whom they were sent. This would ensure that the relationship was reciprocal and that no unhealthy power dynamic could arise in which the disciples were doing all the giving, and the people became indebted or felt less because they couldn't do anything in return. For Jesus, ministry is always uplifting, collaborative and based on sharing of resources and power. This takes humility and faith, but the disciples were given a unique opportunity to participate in God's Reign at work - as we are today.

Today, try to find opportunities to serve, but also be open to being served.

**Practice for Today:** In order to learn to serve, the disciples had to listen to Jesus' message and watch it being demonstrated, and then they had to go out and proclaim it in turn. We are called to do the same thing - to listen to the message of God's Reign and allow our lives to proclaim and demonstrate it. Take time to listen to what God is saying today, and then try to find ways to share it.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I have heard and seen your grace, O God, may I share it with others.

### **Monday 06 July 2015**

**Reading:** Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

**Reflection:** The prophet Ezekiel was called to be a prophet just at the point when he would have been appointed as a priest - if the temple hadn't been destroyed by the Babylonian invaders who had captured him and many other Israelites. Now, he is called to go to his own recently exiled people. They had been conquered because of their disobedience and their insistence on colluding with foreign powers rather than trusting in God's ways, and God warns the prophet that this rebellious streak is still at work in them. In addition, they must have been angry and despairing over their new, unpleasant circumstances. God needed a hard-headed, stubborn and strong messenger to send to these people, and Ezekiel was exactly the right man.

In the vision we read today, Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat - the word of God which he must take into his being in order to be a prophet. Then, God tells him that God has made him as obstinate and hard-hearted as the people to whom he must preach - a characteristic he would need since he would be speaking whether they listened or not. It's comforting to know that even qualities like obstinacy and stubbornness can be used by God. Our personalities and abilities are all part of the equipment we need to answer God's call.

What resources of personality or ability has God given you to use in service of God's Reign?

**Practice for Today:** When we learn to thank God for who we are - even the parts we may be uncertain or ashamed of - we can offer our whole selves to God in worship and service. Today, try giving thanks for who you are, and see how it inspires you to follow Christ more completely.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, God, for making me who I am, and for using me in your service.

### **Tuesday 07 July 2015**

**Reading:** James 5:7-12

**Reflection:** This reading gives us some good advice for living together. When we remember that we are sent to live out God's purpose together, and that this means learning to depend on one another, we need guidelines like these to help us to build strong and caring relationships. James' words are really just common sense, but they are wise and, if we follow them, very effective.

As we wait for, and work for, God's Reign to be fully manifest in our world, we need to learn to be patient and tolerant of one another - since none of us has reached perfection yet. We need to make allowances for one another, recognising that we are all still "works in progress". And, in our communications and commitments it is best if we embrace simplicity and integrity, instead of trying to manipulate and persuade one another with oaths and promises. Not only do these practices help us to live together in love and harmony, they also reflect the grace and love of Christ to anyone who may be observing our life together.

How can you apply James' "relationship tips" in your own relationships today?

**Practice for Today:** The choice to gather in a worshipping community is a significant and prophetic one. It proclaims that we are committed to live well with others, and not make our own individualism our primary focus. Living in community also means making daily choices to be tolerant and patient with others, making allowances for them even as they do for us. Try living like this today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Today, I choose, O God, to appreciate and love those with whom I live, work and worship.

### **Wednesday 08 July 2015**

**Reading:** Jeremiah 16:14-21

**Reflection:** Jeremiah's life and ministry - and the words we read today from his prophecy - all embody the two complementary aspects of being "sent" followers of Jesus: invitation and confrontation. As the prophet predicts the time when people will remember God's deliverance from the exile, there is a sense of hope and comfort. The people are invited to trust that God has not abandoned them and that God will restore and heal them. But that time is not yet. They still need to be confronted with their injustice, violence and mistreatment of the poor and vulnerable. So, Jeremiah also prophesies that judgment is coming. Both the comforting invitation and the challenging confrontation are spoken with the same purpose, though - to lead people into a deeper understanding and knowledge of God. Both invitation and confrontation are designed to bring us into God's life of justice, peace, grace and love.

As followers of Jesus we will also face times when we are confronted with what

must change in us, even as we enjoy God's welcoming invitation. Furthermore, we will all, at times, be called both to invite and confront others in the name of Jesus. When those times come, we must be careful to speak and act in love, in humility and in the best interests of those to whom we are sent - just as Jesus did.

How are you experiencing and proclaiming the invitation and confrontation of God in your life today?

**Practice for Today:** When we embrace our "sentness" and seek to live out the mission of God's Reign together, we will always find intercessory prayer helpful. It enables us to consider, from God's perspective, what needs to be welcomed and what needs to be challenged in Jesus' name. Then, as we pray, we are inspired to live as the answer to our own prayers, for the sake of our world.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May my words and actions welcome others into your grace, while challenging them - and me - to live more graciously, O God.

### **Thursday 09 July 2015**

**Reading:** Colossians 2:1-5

**Reflection:** As usual on a Thursday, our focus begins to shift toward the Sunday to come. This week, the readings speak about human power when it is abused and when it is submitted to God's authority, and our challenge to be those who speak truth to power. In today's reading, Paul reflects on how God's purpose and values are embodied and revealed in Christ. It is when we have received the wisdom and knowledge of God that Christ gives that we discover the confidence to live under God's authority even when it challenges the accepted ways of our culture or community, or when it confronts those who have power over us. When we live under Christ's authority, we are freed from the manipulation and control of other agendas and authorities, and we are able to be agents of God's wisdom, justice and love in our world.

It can be tough to face the truth that following Christ is not an easy way to being liked, healthy and happy. On the contrary, following Christ often means we have to make unpopular stands against injustice. Following Christ often brings us into conflict with those who are invested in abusive, oppressive or unequal systems of wealth and power. This doesn't mean we all have to be activists. It does mean, though, that our values and daily decisions must be informed by God's values, and not those of the world around us.

What does it mean for you to live under Jesus' authority today?

**Practice for Today:** It all starts and ends with Jesus for us - or, at least, with the Reign of God which Jesus embodied and proclaimed. This means that when we respond to Jesus' life and message in praise, we open ourselves to the wisdom and knowledge that Jesus offers us, and we place ourselves under his authority. Are you willing to try this throughout today?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Jesus, in you I see God's Reign and what it means to be human, and I praise you.

## **Friday 10 July 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 24

**Reflection:** The Israelites, believing that they needed God's presence with them to be victorious, would often take the Ark of the Covenant, which represented God's presence, with them into battle. When they returned, there would be a great procession as the Ark was returned to its place in the Tabernacle. This Sunday, one of the readings tells of David bringing the Ark to Jerusalem for the first time since David had made that city his capital, and since the Ark had been captured and returned by the Philistines. It was such a euphoric procession that David stripped down to his underwear and danced with abandon. Psalm 24 would have been the kind of Psalm they would have sung in such a procession, and may even have been used on this day.

The importance of this celebration is that it proclaimed to everyone that God was the true of Monarch of Israel. Even the king was under God's authority since God had created the earth and set all things in order. Part of what made David Israel's best king is that, in spite of his many failings, he never stopped living in worship of, and submission to, his God. He remained a worshipper for his whole life, which is why the Psalm includes a call to live with pure hands (service) and hearts (worship), and to open the gates of the Tabernacle and of the heart to God.

Today, why not imagine a procession in your own heart as you establish God as Monarch in your life again?

**Practice for Today:** The call to open the gates is a wonderful invocation. It invites us to welcome the God who always dwells within us and among us, and to be aware of God's presence and glory in our lives and our world. Today, practice this invocation prayer throughout the day and let it remind you of God's unfailing love.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I open the gates of my heart to you, O God, my Monarch.

## **Saturday 11 July 2015**

**Reading:** Luke 1:57-80

**Reflection:** It may feel strange to be reading a passage that is often associated with Christmas, but tomorrow the Gospel speaks of the death of John the Baptist. It is appropriate, then, to reflect on his remarkable birth today. Luke's Gospel draws a number of parallels between the birth of John and the birth of Jesus. This is not just because they were cousins, but because their lives and ministries were so intertwined. In both cases, the circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of these two boys were mysterious and startling. What stands out in today's reading is how Zechariah, John's father, gets his voice back when he proclaims that his son's name will be John. Although he had doubted and resisted God's call in the beginning, Zechariah is now completely submitted to the purpose of God.

His song is also an amazing moment in Scripture. It speaks about the fulfilment of the promise that the Messiah would come, and acknowledges that the boy, John, was to be the forerunner. It was this ministry that brought John into conflict with

the corrupt powers of his day and that ultimately led to him being executed by King Herod. Yet, in spite of this, the impact of John's ministry, and of Jesus who came after him, could not be stopped by killing either of these men. Their commitment to God's Reign of love and justice was so strong and their ministry so effective that we still feel the effects today. Both Jesus and John loved living the life of love and justice so much that even death could not deter them.

How can you increase your commitment to God's Reign of love and justice today? What are you willing to sacrifice for the cause of Christ?

**Practice for Today:** Once again we are challenged to practice the discipline of commitment and dedication today. God's Reign is where abundant life is to be found, but living by the principles and values of God's Reign means letting go of our investment in the systems of our society. This can be very difficult and painful, and can bring us into conflict with those who are invested in the status quo. Can you make such a commitment today?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I dedicate myself to your Reign of justice and love, O God, even when the cost is high and painful.

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