

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
12 - 18 July 2015

Thought for the Week:

Although devotion to God and to God's ways offers a life of fulfilment and meaning, it also often leads us into conflict. The reason for this is that the values of God's Reign are so different from those in the world around us. It is common for us to find ourselves at odds with ways that are considered 'normal' for our society, but that are revealed to be dysfunctional when seen through the lens of Jesus' message and life. Sometimes the conflicts we face are with those in authority over us - governments, corporate bosses or religious leaders. Sometimes, and more painfully, our conflicts may be with those closest to us.

In the Lectionary readings for this Sunday you may have read the accounts of one of two people who found themselves in conflict because of their relationship with God. In the Old Testament, David, who has finally succeeded in bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, expresses his joy and devotion by stripping down to his underwear and dancing passionately before God. His wife, Michal, however, does not approve, and when he returns home, she mocks him. In Mark's Gospel, we read of John the Baptist who, after speaking out about the corruption and immorality of King Herod, finds himself in prison, and then executed, in the confrontation with the powers that be.

Like these two men, we will all find ourselves in situations of conflict as we follow Jesus. The challenge for us, though, is to oppose injustice and stand for what we believe in a spirit of love and humility. We are never released from the call to love even our enemies. In fact, when we can deal with conflict in a spirit of love and humility, that's when God's grace shines most clearly through us.

Sunday 12 July 2015

Reading: Mark 6:14-29

Reflection: King Herod was a powerful ruler, but he was a weak human being. He liked listening to John, even though John challenged him, but he was too afraid of his wife and friends to put what John said into practice. John, on the other hand, had no power or status, but he was a very strong human being. He was not afraid to confront Herod's corruption and speak out for what he believed was right in God's eyes. Ultimately it got him killed, but John died as a man of justice, integrity and strength, and his life left a significant mark on the world. John the Baptist was a true representative of what it means to live the purposes and values of God's Reign.

We all have places of weakness within us. Even the apostle Paul spoke of finding God's strength in his weakness. The problem is not that we are weak. The problem is when we refuse to admit our weaknesses and allow God's strength to

work in and through them. Our weaknesses are not an excuse for failing to follow Christ's way. They are simply an invitation to allow God to transform us and use us.

Where are you wrestling with weaknesses today? How can you find strength in God's ways, and learn to live a little more with integrity and justice?

Practice for Today: The twin practices of confession and receiving God's absolution are powerful gifts of transformation and healing. Confession brings our weaknesses to the light and opens us to God's strengthening, healing power. Absolution gives us the assurance that God forgives and transforms us. Try using these two practices throughout the day, whenever your weakness threatens to overwhelm you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May your strength transform my weakness into a life of integrity and justice, O God.

Monday 13 July 2015

Reading: Acts 21:27-39

Reflection: You may remember reading a while ago that Paul had many friends who had warned him not to go to Jerusalem. Well, in today's reading, the trouble they were worried about is starting. The cause seems like such a silly thing. Paul has befriended a Gentile and is showing him around the city. Then, when someone spots Paul in the Temple, the religious people assume (without checking their facts) that Paul has brought the Gentile man into the Temple courts with him, thereby defiling the Temple. As the crowd gets whipped up in a frenzy of anger, they have only one purpose: to kill this "heretic". Paul is finally saved only by the riot police!

But, then, instead of turning his own anger on the crowds, Paul asks to speak to them. If you keep reading, you'll discover that he tells them his story, and tries to explain why he has come to the place that he has. Even though they don't listen, Paul treats this hostile crowd with dignity and respect. He continues to do the same with his captors and interrogators in the journey that results from this incident as he is taken to Rome in chains.

Paul was dedicated to the cause of Christ - to inclusivity, respect and love. Here it brought him into conflict with his own people, but he remained committed and true to his cause. How can you learn from Paul's example today?

Practice for Today: Paul dedicated himself to the Reign of God no matter what it cost him. It may sound like this kind of dedication is too high a price to pay, but it is here that we discover a life of fullness, meaning and purpose. Today, try to offer small acts of dedication whenever you can.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I dedicate myself to you and your Reign, O God, even when the cost feels high.

Tuesday 14 July 2015

Reading: Psalm 142

Reflection: According to the title of this Psalm, it was written during the time when David was hiding out in caves as a refugee from Saul. The king had become so obsessed with David's popularity that he was single minded in his desire to see David dead. The result was that David ended up on the run, living in some pretty tough circumstances and fearing for his life. The words of this song reflect David's grief and follow the typical structure of a lament. It starts with David crying out to God for mercy and then moves into his complaint. No one seems willing to help David, yet, he continues to put his trust in God, finally expressing his confidence that, even in these tough times, God is good to him.

I suspect it was songs like these that kept David's faith strong and helped him remember his connection to God even when God seemed so far away. I also suspect that it was this that enabled him to refrain from killing Saul when he had the chance. When Saul came into his cave to relieve himself one day, David could easily have sneaked up behind him and ended his life, and all of David's struggles, but he refused to do so. All he did was cut off a corner of Saul's cloak to show him that he had no desire to hurt him.

It's always hard when we face times of suffering and persecution, and it's tempting to try to get back at those who hurt us. But, the way of Jesus is to cry out to God, to trust in God's presence and strength, and to keep working to love our enemies in Christ's name.

Practice for Today: When we are hurting and angry we need an outlet. Pretending that we don't feel what we feel is not helpful. All it does is push the feelings down inside of us where they will fester and eventually find another, destructive, way out. The practice of lament is a powerful way to bring our feelings to God and allow God to carry them and transform them. Try this with any anger or grief you experience today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Even when I am hurting and grieving, O God, I trust in you.

Wednesday 15 July 2015

Reading: Luke 7:31-35

Reflection: When John was arrested by Herod he obviously went through a bit of a faith crisis. He sent his disciples to Jesus to confirm that he really was the expected one. After sending them back to John with a message describing Jesus' ministry, Jesus starts talking (in today's reading) about John and about how the religious leaders criticise both John and Jesus for opposite reasons. It is clear that they are just looking for excuses to deny the message that both men preached. Jesus compares them to children playing games, but getting upset because they don't get their own way.

The truth is that even when we follow Jesus we won't please everyone, and there will always be those who oppose the values of God's Reign. All we can do is take

the words of Jesus to heart: "Wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it." If we can focus less on those who might challenge or criticise us, and more on following the wisdom of Christ, our lives become a testimony to God's grace and love, and we enjoy the benefit of God's presence and guidance each day.

How can you commit to following God's wisdom a little more today?

Practice for Today: Prayer is a good way to stay strong in our relationship with God, especially when we are criticised and challenged. This means that we pray not just for ourselves, but also for our detractors. It also means that asking for wisdom will often be a feature of our prayer life. Perhaps you need to pray like this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me the wisdom of your ways, O God, so I may follow them.

Thursday 16 July 2015

Reading: Colossians 1:15-23

Reflection: On the Sunday past we saw what it means to stand firm in our faith even when it brings us into conflict with others, especially those in authority over us. On this coming Sunday we explore what it means to be part of the household or dynasty of God in which Christ is the true authority and the Good Shepherd who cares for and welcomes us. Today's reading includes a quote from what was probably one of the first Christian hymns (verses 15-20). It praises Jesus as the incarnate God, the Creator and Sustainer of all, and as the one who reconciles us to one another and to God through his death.

When we know that we are welcomed into God's household and that we are under the care of the Good Shepherd, we are able to stand firm no matter what we may experience, or what may be thrown at us by the "bad shepherds" we deal with each day. We also discover that in Christ's name we are able to be good shepherds toward those who are under our care. So, as Christ has welcomed us and reconciled us to God, we can become people of welcome and reconciliation.

What would it mean for you to follow Christ's example of being a "good shepherd" today?

Practice for Today: When we read words like those in today's Scripture passage, it's hard not to get caught up in praise and awe at who Christ is and what he does for us. Today, why not take time to remember who Jesus is for you, and respond in praise at every opportunity?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Good Shepherd, who invites me, and all creation, into God's household, I praise you.

Friday 17 July 2015

Reading: Psalm 89:20-37

Reflection: One of the readings for this Sunday tells of David's desire to build a

Temple for God. When David suggests this to Nathan the prophet, at first he agrees, but then God sends him back to David with a message that David is not to build a house for God. Rather God is going to build a house (dynasty) for David - an eternal rule that will bring blessing on his descendants. The Psalm that we read today expresses God's amazing commitment. It was this promise that the people of Israel held in their hearts as they waited for the Messiah, the good shepherd that was to be the descendant of David, born to take up the throne of David. It was also this promise that the New Testament Church believed had been fulfilled in Jesus.

The good news of this promise for us is that we are the descendants of Christ - the daughters and sons of God - and so we are included in this promise of blessing, this household of God, this everlasting Reign of peace and justice. It's important to notice that, in spite of the promise in this Psalm, Jesus was overcome by evil, he *was* defeated and he *did* die in horrific pain. But, we also know that this was not the end of the story - life always comes out of death in the Reign of God. So, even though we may at times feel overcome by evil and pain, we can know that life will ultimately triumph, and that God's Reign is continuing to grow and expand in the world. It came through Jesus, and it continues to come into the world through us.

What does it mean for you to be included in the household of the Good Shepherd? How can you allow this to shape how you live today?

Practice for Today: It's always helpful, when we seek to receive God's promises, to begin with thanksgiving. The practice of giving thanks opens us to God's presence and promise, and prepares us to experience God's grace. Today, give thanks for the promise of God's welcoming Reign.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, for the promise of your Reign and for including me in it.

Saturday 18 July 2015

Reading: Luke 18:35-43

Reflection: In the Gospel reading from Mark that is set for tomorrow, Jesus looks at the crowds who are following him and has compassion on them because they are like sheep without a shepherd. Then, as they bring their sick friends and family, Jesus touches and heals them. Today we read of one such healing, a blind beggar who refused to be silenced when he heard that Jesus was coming, but made sure his request was heard. Somehow this man knew that Jesus would have compassion on him, and so he would not let anything stop him making contact with Jesus.

What is touching about this story is Jesus' personal interest. He doesn't make any assumptions, but gives the man the dignity of framing his request. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asks. Then, only once the man has made his reply, does Jesus respond. It may seem like an unnecessary thing for Jesus to have done. Surely he knew what the man wanted and needed? But, sometimes, we

really need to voice our needs, to know that we've been heard. The healing that came from this question was more than just of the man's eyes, but of his heart. As a beggar he was probably used to being ignored and silenced. But, Jesus treated him with respect and listened to him. Jesus didn't only give him eyes. Jesus also gave him a voice.

What would it mean to imagine that Jesus is asking you the same question today?

Practice for Today: In prayer we often feel like we are the only ones who are to do any asking, but, in today's reading we learn that sometimes God asks us things as well - "What do you want me to do for you?" To listen for God's searching questions is a good and transforming discipline. Try it in your prayer life today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I am listening, Jesus, for anything you might want to ask me.

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