

## **Sacredise Daily Worship**

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

26 July - 01 August 2015

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

This week, if you read the Lectionary readings, you will face a challenging choice. On the one hand, the Old Testament tells the story of David's lowest moment. One day as he is looking out from the roof of his palace he sees Bathsheba bathing, and, motivated by his lust, he sets about seducing her, ignoring the fact that she is married to one his soldiers. When she falls pregnant, he calls the man home, and tries to set things up so he will sleep with his wife and cover up the fact that she got pregnant by another man. Unfortunately for David, Uriah is a faithful and selfless man, and spends the night at the door of the palace, refusing to sleep in comfort while his comrades are sleeping out on the battlefield. When David sees that his plan has failed, he arranges to have Uriah killed. It's a moment when David's lust and self-interest become deeply destructive. He already had wives, and wealth beyond measure, but when he saw this woman, he allowed his desire to have the one thing he did not possess to consume him. The consequences of this choice led to the ultimate division of David's kingdom as the children and grandchildren of his different wives turned to rivalries and conflict.

On the other hand, the Gospel tells the story of a boy who, denying his own hunger, offers his tiny packed lunch to share with a huge crowd. There's a key here - if this child had brought food with him, many others must have done so as well. But, where he is willing to share, they obviously aren't. But, then, his sacrifice and faith opens the door for them to trust and to share, which means that there is enough for all. Straight after this, Jesus saves his disciples from a storm by coming to them across the water. This is another faith-building moment for them.

So, here is the choice for this week: How will we choose to live? Do we allow ourselves to be controlled and directed by our own needs, desires, and self-interest, like David? Or do we choose the path of faith and generous self-giving like the boy with the food, or like Jesus himself? This is one of the most important decisions we will ever make, and it's one we need to make daily.

### **Sunday 26 July 2015**

**Reading:** John 6:1-21

**Reflection:** The people of Israel had been waiting for a very long time for a Messiah - a prophet like Moses. The writer of John's Gospel seeks to show his readers that Jesus is the one they've been waiting for. To do this, he shows Jesus doing what Moses did - only better. Moses (or God through Moses) fed the people in the desert by sending manna - the strange bread-like substance. Moses rescued the people of Israel by separating the waters of the sea and leading the people through. Jesus feeds a crowd from very meagre resources, and then offers

himself as the Bread of Life. Jesus walks on the water, and saves his followers in the process. Jesus is not just *like* Moses, John says. Jesus is *far better* than Moses.

The people began to get a glimpse of this truth and, in verse 14, seemed certain he was the one they'd been expecting. But, they didn't understand what kind of Messiah Jesus had come to be. He was not coming as a conquering king, but as a crucified servant offering his life to nourish the world. When this became clear, many of his followers turned away - they couldn't deal with the idea that life is found through sacrifice and death. Many still turn away at this truth today. But, the only way to a resurrection is through a cross. Only when Jesus' body is broken can he be the Bread of Life that feeds the world. And only when we are willing to follow him through death to life, can we be the Body of Christ that brings life to others.

What does it mean for you that Jesus is the Messiah, the Bread of Life?

**Practice for Today:** Like the people of Israel, we sometimes have very clear ideas of what we want God to be for us. But, if God is God, we cannot manipulate or dictate to God. The practice of praise reminds us who God really is, and opens us to connect with God as God is - not as we might want God to be.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, Jesus, that you are the God I need - not the God I might want you to be.

### **Monday 27 July 2015**

**Reading:** Philippians 4:10-20

**Reflection:** If there was ever a community that lived their faith, and rejected self-interest, it was the Philippians. They were not a wealthy church, but they willingly and generously gave what they could to support Paul in his apostolic ministry. The letter to the Philippians was written, in part, to thank the church for its gifts, and to assure them of God's sustaining grace. One thing that becomes clear as we read today's passage is that faith and generosity always go together. Generosity requires us to trust that there is enough to go around, and to be willing to share what we have with others. When we do have faith, we cannot help but share with others, because we are motivated by the values of simplicity and generosity that characterise God's Reign.

We all have some kind of abundance, whether it's time, resources, or abilities. We all know the temptation to hoard what we have in case there comes a time when we won't have enough. This brings us face to face with this week's choice again - which will guide our lives: self-interest or faith? If we choose the way of faith, it doesn't guarantee that we will never struggle or live without - Paul shows that he had experienced both plenty and little. But, faith does mean that, whatever we may experience, our lives will be committed to God's purposes - and that will have a positive impact on the world. Also, as we live in communities of faith, we often discover that our needs are provided for, even as we sometimes help to provide for others.

What gift can you give to someone else today?

**Practice for Today:** The practice of giving teaches us faith, even as it is also an expression of faith. As we make the choice to give, we place our own self-interest aside in favour of God's Reign, and as we do this, we experience the freedom of trusting in God, and knowing that we have helped to bring life to others. Try making today a day of generous giving.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I give myself to you, O God, teach me to trust you more.

### **Tuesday 28 July 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 111

**Reflection:** When it comes to choosing faith over fear or self-interest, Psalms like this one are a great inspiration. This song is a powerful reminder of God's goodness and grace, and it encourages us to trust in God's commandments and God's active presence in our lives. It is reassuring to hear again that God remembers God's covenant - God's enduring promise - to God's people. It is comforting to know that following God's ways brings us wisdom, and opens us to God's mercy and grace.

The first verse is an important introduction to the message of this Psalm, though. The Psalmist speaks about meeting with God's "godly people". It is always easier to make the choice for faith when we stay in community with others who choose faith. It can be tough to stay strong in faith alone, but when we can lean on the faith of others, it makes choosing faith much easier. That's why Jesus always called people into community. It's also why David failed so badly - he didn't tell anyone about his attraction to Bathsheba, or what he was planning to do. He acted alone and secretly, and in that moment, he lost faith with the values that had shaped his life.

How can you stay connected with your faith community today?

**Practice for Today:** Gathering is a great way to sustain and strengthen our faith. This doesn't just have to happen in church on Sundays or midweek meetings. It can happen in any moment as you connect with a believing friend by sharing coffee, chatting on the phone, or through email. Try it today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, O God, for my companions in faith who strengthen and support me in my faith choices.

### **Wednesday 29 July 2015**

**Reading:** Isaiah 25:6-10a

**Reflection:** Meals, feasts and the sharing of food have always been significant in God's work. Since our need for food and drink is so basic to our survival, it makes sense that God's grace and presence are often communicated through the provision of these necessities. In this prophecy from Isaiah, we see God promising life and blessing to God's people, and the main metaphor is of a feast in which

delicious food and fine wine is served. The result of this divine feast is that God's people receive life. It's a wonderful promise of restoration, provision and salvation.

For Jesus, meals were also important. The feeding of the crowd was just one instance of Jesus working through a meal. Jesus often taught at meals, and, of course, at the resurrection, it was often through meals that Jesus revealed himself. He even gave us a meal by which to remember him. But, meals are even more significant than this. In the readings for this coming Sunday, we will hear Jesus' proclaiming that he is the Bread of Life. Jesus offers himself as the nourishment for our souls and the "food" that leads us to abundant, eternal life! This means that every meal can be an opportunity to remember Christ's gift, and to "feast" on Christ's presence and grace.

How can you remember and encounter Christ as you eat and drink today?

**Practice for Today:** The sacrament of Holy Communion is a simple but profound practice in our worship that opens us to the presence and grace of God. It also reminds us that every meal can be a sacrament. Today, remember Jesus and open yourself to his presence whenever you share a meal.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** In the food I eat and the drink I share I remember and encounter you, Jesus.

### **Thursday 30 July 2015**

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

**Reflection:** As I mentioned yesterday, this Sunday John's Gospel tells of Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Life. Many scholars connect Chapter 6 of John's Gospel - and this Bread of Life section particularly - with the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion. It is certainly an important passage for understanding what Communion means and how it leads us into the life of Christ.

There can be no doubt that, in Paul's mind, the Communion meal we share in worship must connect us with Jesus' message and mission. Paul challenges the Corinthian church because they have turned Holy Communion into something that divides, and in which some have too much and others don't have enough. What is supposed to unite the community of faith is splitting it apart, and instead of sharing in faith, the believers are selfishly grabbing for themselves.

The same is true of our response to the Bread of Life. Sometimes we like to think of Jesus as a doorway to personal salvation only. As long as we know we're going to heaven, we think, it doesn't matter what happens to others. But, part of the Gospel invitation is always for those who have enjoyed the Bread of Life to share life with others. The lesson is clear - we cannot know the abundant life of Christ unless we share it wherever and however we can. This doesn't just mean telling others about Jesus. It means becoming the hands and feet, the food and drink, of Jesus to those in need.

How can you share the Bread of Life today?

**Practice for Today:** Prayer for others is one good way to share life, especially

when it drives us into action on behalf of those for whom we pray. Today spend time praying for others - especially those who face the curse of hunger every day.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have filled me with the Bread of Life, O God, may I share life with everyone I encounter.

### **Friday 31 July 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 78:23-29

**Reflection:** One of the great stories of Israel's faith was of God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness after they had escaped from Egypt. Moses was remembered as the great leader who had been used by God to liberate God's people, and then provide and care for them as they travelled in the wilderness. This Psalm remembers these events and celebrates God's mighty acts on behalf of God's people. The last statements of this section are challenging: "The people ate their fill. [God] gave them what they craved." These words remind us that God's provision is always sufficient for our need - even though it may not always feel like it. The Israelites soon got tired of manna and started grumbling that God's provision was not enough. In the same way we often have far more than we need, but get afraid when our comfortable lifestyles are under threat. Many of us can comfortably make do with less than we enjoy - and in so doing could provide for others who have much less than we do.

Jesus referred to these events in John 6. It must have been a challenging sermon to hear, because Jesus called the people to radical faith. He claimed that those who come to him find food that nourishes body and soul, drink that refreshes the whole person, and life that overcomes death. This is the provision that we really need - the craving that longs to be filled in all of us.

How can you receive the nourishment of the Bread of Life of today?

**Practice for Today:** As we celebrate God's gift of life today the only appropriate response is thanksgiving - and it's one that strengthens our faith and opens us to receive yet more of God's goodness.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, Jesus, for being the true food and drink that gives me true life.

### **Saturday 01 August 2015**

**Reading:** Matthew 16:5-12

**Reflection:** Sometimes it's amusing how obsessed we get with the basic details of life. For those who don't know where their next meal is coming from, this obsession is appropriate, but for those of us who have our basic needs met, it's really quite ridiculous. But, Jesus' disciples were just like us. After all that they had seen Jesus do, they get into an argument over who was supposed to have packed the bread. Yet, the feeding of the crowd was not, for Jesus, about the miracle or even the provision of food. It was about understanding the difference between the kind of life he offered and that of the religious leaders.

Using yeast - which makes bread rise and gives it its character - as his example, Jesus warns his disciples about the teaching of the Pharisees. His problem was that they had allowed themselves to be so caught up in details, rules and ideas, that they couldn't recognise God's life. In the process, they were keeping others from life as well. Jesus, on the other hand, was willing to "break" laws and even lay down his life to bring life to others.

Which "yeast" characterises our lives - that of legalism and religion for its own sake, or that of Jesus and of life?

**Practice for Today:** We need to recognise that living by law is much easier than following the life-giving way of love. Love requires improvisation and the ability to respond to each moment according to what it requires. We can only do this by committing to Jesus' way of love and opening ourselves to the power of God's Spirit. Today, recommit yourself to living as Jesus did.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Bread of Life, I commit myself to following you and to sharing your life with others.

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