

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
02 - 08 August 2015

Thought for the Week:

What does it mean to believe? David, who had trusted in God as his shepherd through his whole life, brought destruction on himself and his family because he allowed his lust to overcome his faith. Instead of staying true to his convictions, he became secretive, manipulative and murderous, and the impact of his actions reverberated through the rest of his life. This week the Lectionary tells the story of how God confronts David with what he has done, and forgives him. But notice, also, that God does not remove the consequences of David's actions. Sometimes the only way to find our way back to a life of integrity and wholeness is through experiencing the pain of what we have done.

In John's Gospel the people, who had witnessed the feeding of the crowd, track Jesus down and ask him what they must do to accomplish God's will. Jesus' answer is that they must believe, but they ask him for a miracle. It seems they had already forgotten the food he had provided for them and they had completely missed Jesus' exhortation to go beyond seeking food to seek God's Reign! The people point to Moses' manna as an example of God's miracles (again, seemingly not making any connection with the food they had already received), but Jesus points them to himself as the Bread of Life.

So, what does it mean to believe? It doesn't have much to do with what goes on in our heads. It's about sharing in the life of Christ (eating the Bread of Life is Jesus' metaphor) so that our lives embody the grace, compassion, justice and peace of God's Reign. We can say what we like, but it is the fruit of our lives that demonstrates what we really believe. In the end, both David's faith and that of the crowds were insufficient to free them from their own self-interest. May this week's meditations lead us to a faith that is more than that – that empowers us to live with the self-giving love of Christ.

Sunday 02 August 2015

Reading: John 6:24-35

Reflection: It's a radical claim that Jesus makes: those who come to him will never be hungry or thirsty again. It's easy to turn this into an excuse for a prosperity Gospel, but that is certainly not what Jesus meant. Although Jesus definitely was concerned about feeding the hungry, in this instance he wasn't talking about physical hunger, but about a hunger for God's Reign. The words he speaks here resonate with Matthew's Beatitudes, especially "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6 NLT).

When our lives are oriented around the values of God's Reign – justice, peace and love – then our hunger and thirst for justice and love is filled – even though

we may suffer physically. That's why Jesus also calls us to seek God's Reign first (Matthew 6:33). It's our commitment to the generous grace, the compassionate justice and the self-giving love of God that leads us into a life of abundance.

The question implied in Jesus' conversation with the crowd applies to us as well: will we prioritise our physical desires or God's Reign? It's a question we answer anew every day.

Practice for Today: In a world with so much suffering it can grow tiring to constantly speak of justice, but the Gospel demands that we do not give up the quest to manifest God's Reign in our world. One of the best ways we can participate in bringing justice into our world is to pray – and then to live what we pray each day. Why not make prayer – spoken and lived – today's practice?

Breath-Prayer for Today: May my prayers and my life increase your justice in the world, O God.

Monday 03 August 2015

Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24

Reflection: There's a generalisation in today's reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that may not really make sense to us. Paul contrasts the believers with the "Gentiles". Of course, even in Paul's time, there were Gentiles who believed in Jesus, but Paul is referring here to the practices of pagan worship that were common in Ephesus. The city was famous for its temple of Artemis (or Diana) and the fertility cult that it fostered, which would explain Paul's concern about the "lustful pleasures" of those who are "far from God." In contrast, Paul calls the believers to a life of purity, righteousness and holiness.

Purity for Paul is about refusing to be controlled by the desires of our bodies (including the legitimate ones) but living from the higher purpose of God's Reign. Righteousness is associated with justice – with living according to God's standards of equality, inclusivity and compassion. Holiness here refers to piety, a life of reverence for, and connection with, God. All of these qualities flow from the work of God's Spirit in us. This is what it means to eat "the Bread of Life" that Jesus offers us. The promise that has been shown to be true in millions of lives through the ages is this: living by God's Reign leads to life that is full and free. Try it for yourself!

Practice for Today: If we seek to live a Christlike life – one of integrity, justice and connection with God – we will need to become very comfortable with the practice of confession. We all fail. We all hurt others. We all have moments when we stray from our convictions and our connection with God. Confession enables us to be healed and restored. What do you need to confess today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I fall short of the values of your Reign, O God, forgive and restore me.

Tuesday 04 August 2015

Reading: Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Reflection: The book of Deuteronomy is the "second law" (that's what the name means) given by Moses to the Israelites just before they were to enter the Promised Land. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, almost all of the generation that had left Egypt had died. Now Moses has a last chance to impress God's law on the hearts and minds of this new generation. It's a strange picture of God that Moses paints. God's relationship with God's people is based on God's absolute control. For example, verse 3 speaks of God letting the people go hungry and then feeding them to humble them. It is also built on a system of reward and punishment. If the people remain obedient and faithful, Moses says, they will receive the reward of the Promised Land, and a life of health, wealth and happiness. But, if they disobey, they will be punished and experience pain and suffering. It was a radically new and better way to understand God for these people who had lived under the fickle Egyptian gods for so long, but they still had centuries of learning to do.

In keeping with the New Testament theme of the Bread of Life, there is a repeated reference to God's provision of food for God's people. But the more important emphasis is on life coming from following God's word (verse 3). This points forward to Jesus who taught this in an even deeper and more transforming way. Only in Jesus do we get a more complete picture of God, and it's very different. It's no longer about reward and punishment but about grace and mercy. There are still warnings and calls to justice, but these relate more to the consequences of our acts than to punishment. The fundamental truth remains the same, though. We live not by bread, but by every word of God – and God's final word is Jesus.

How can you live by God's word today?

Practice for Today: Ultimately it's not law that leads us to live faithfully as we follow Christ – it's love. That's why Jesus constantly calls us to love God and neighbour. One of the best ways to nurture love in our hearts is through praise. What we value and admire, we come to love. Today, grow your love for God – and faithfulness to God – through the practice of praise.

Breath-Prayer for Today: God of grace and mercy, I praise you for reaching out to me with your love.

Wednesday 05 August 2015

Reading: Isaiah 55:1-9

Reflection: This passage from Isaiah is a wonderful promise of restoration and provision. These words were probably written to the people who had returned from exile and were now trying to rebuild their nation after the destruction and conquest of previous years. It was a lean time in which resources were limited, and people were tempted to question whether it was even worth it to try and rebuild their broken nation. Yet, through the prophet, God assures the people that

God will sustain them (see again the promise of food) and restore them to be God's glorious people – a people who are blessed to bless others.

Through it all there is the exhortation to live faithfully, and to trust in God's ways, even though they may often seem completely beyond our understanding. After all, a God that was easy for us to understand would not be God at all! Faith, then, is not only about experiencing God's grace and goodness. It is also about learning to be comfortable with God's mystery. As soon as we think we've got God figured out, we fall into idolatry. As A.W. Tozer said, "The essence of idolatry is to hold thoughts about God that are unworthy of [God]".

How can you open yourself to God's mystery a little more today?

Practice for Today: So often in our worship we spend all the time talking or singing, and very little time in silence. The danger here is that we may just keep repeating what we already know of God, and never allow God to lead us deeper into the mystery of God's self. Today, spend some time in silence and allow the mystery of God to feed your soul.

Breath-Prayer for Today: O God, in silence and awe I meditate on your mystery.

Thursday 06 August 2015

Reading: Romans 15:1-6

Reflection: Our faith in Christ is not just about what we think, but about how we live, and especially how we treat one another. This coming Sunday we get a glimpse of two surprising responses to conflict. In the Old Testament, David grieves the death of his son, Absalom, in spite of the fact that he had started a rebellion against his father. Even though the relationship had broken down, David refuses to stop loving his son, and mourns his death bitterly. In the Gospel of John, Jesus offers life to anyone who will come to him, including the religious leaders who oppose him. Their challenge and criticism didn't change Jesus' convictions, but they also didn't stop him from inviting his critics into God's life. These two stories are a challenge to us to allow our faith in God to be reflected in how we treat others.

In today's reading from Romans, Paul gives some practical guidelines for living faithfully together. He calls us to be sensitive and considerate of others, and not to live only to please ourselves. He calls us to patience and unity so that God can be praised in our life together. Sometimes this is easier said than done, especially with those who have harmed us or who are very different from us. That's why we need both the example of Jesus and the power of the Spirit to help us. But, the constant quest to love better is a Gospel call that we cannot avoid.

How can you commit to living harmoniously with others today?

Practice for Today: It can be tough to live with others, whether friends, family or companions in faith. But, faith is not a solitary experience. Spiritual growth always means learning to be more loving and that means we need others to love. Today, try to find a measure of unity and harmony with everyone you spend time with.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have loved me, O God, even when I don't deserve it, teach me to love and serve others.

Friday 07 August 2015

Reading: Galatians 6:1-10

Reflection: The mark of our faith is seen in our lives. When we live as true followers of Jesus the difference this makes to us, to others and to our world is remarkable. When we embody the grace, compassion and justice of Jesus, we contribute to making the world more whole. We have seen this truth expressed over and over in the Scriptures we have studied, and it's here again today.

In today's passage from Galatians, Paul speaks in very practical terms about what it means to live like Jesus. It's about gently holding each other accountable. It's about sharing each other's burdens and serving each other. It's about taking responsibility for our own work and our own lives. It's about planting the seeds of the Spirit so that we can reap life. In summary, as verse 10 says, our faith in Christ is best seen when we do good to everyone, whenever we can.

It seems amazing that it can be that simple – but living like this can be hard. That's why Paul emphasises our need of God's Spirit to enable us. How can you "do good" in the power of the Spirit today?

Practice for Today: All good deeds are about giving in some way. Sometimes doing good means giving of our finances. Sometimes it means giving of our time, or friendship, or abilities, or connections. Whatever it may be, it's always about recognising what we have to give, and then being willing to give it. Make today a day of generous giving.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I give myself to do good for the sake of your Reign, O God.

Saturday 08 August 2015

Reading: Matthew 7:7-11

Reflection: Sometimes the call of Jesus can feel really hard. The challenge to give of ourselves, to work for justice, and to love our neighbours and enemies can become overwhelming and exhausting. But, it's not only about what we give and what we do for others. In fact, we are only able to serve and give because of God's generosity to us in the first place. That's what Jesus reminds us of in today's well-known reading from Matthew's Gospel.

I like the way the New Living Translation translates the words for ask, seek and knock - "Keep on asking...Keep on seeking...Keep on knocking..." This shows that Jesus is not speaking about a once-off activity, but a constant way of being in our relationship with God. And as we constantly acknowledge our dependence on God – by asking, seeking and knocking – there is a promise that God will give us good gifts. The gifts may not always be what we expect, but they will always be good. Many who have followed Christ for a long time can attest to this in their own

lives. And most pastors have seen this principle at work in the lives of numerous others with whom they live and work.

What do you need to ask for, seek for and knock for today?

Practice for Today: Often what we seek is right under our noses. Sometimes we ask for what we already have without realising it. And sometimes, in order to receive God's gifts, we need to have a receptive attitude. In all of these cases, the practice that helps us to receive God's goodness is thanksgiving. Give thanks for all the good you enjoy today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that you always give me good gifts.

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