

# ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

09 - 15 August 2015

## **Thought for the Week:**

How do we deal with those who oppose us, both within our families and among our enemies? When someone who has betrayed us or attacked us dies, how do we respond? Outside of God's Reign we may feel that we are justified in retaliating against our opponents. We may feel justified in celebrating the demise of our enemies. But, when we seek to live according to the principles of God's Reign these responses are no longer an option for us.

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus continues to explain what he means when he proclaims himself as the Bread of Life. He invites all who would come to him to eat and drink and know life, and he promises that those who share in his life will be raised at the last day. His promise is for an overflowing abundant life that cannot be destroyed even by death – and Jesus offers this invitation to all. He is not cowed by his opponents, but invites even them to come to him to find life. In the Old Testament, David grieves for his son, Absalom. If you trace the story, it becomes clear that David had failed as a father. Although he did try, rather half-heartedly, to make things right with his son, Absalom becomes so angry that he undermines David's rule, and ultimately leads a rebellion against his father. Then, when Absalom is killed in battle, David's response is not relief or celebration at the demise of an enemy, but deep grief over the lost of a son.

The essential message this week is this: We can never use the actions of others as an excuse to fail to love our enemies. It's not that it's easy to love those who oppose us. It's that to do anything other than love simply increases the cycle of evil and violence, and leads us and our world into destruction. It's a tough call this week – but a life-giving one.

## **Sunday 09 August 2015**

**Reading:** John 6:35, 41-51

**Reflection:** John 6 is a tough section of the Gospel to read and understand. The claims that Jesus makes here are shocking and hard for his listeners to believe. On the one hand, they know Jesus and his family, so his claim to a divine origin seems far-fetched. On the other hand, he claims to be able to give life – through eating his flesh! Apart from the disturbing cannibalistic overtones, for the Jews it is blasphemy for a human being to claim to be a source of life. But, clearly Jesus is not concerned about people's opinions. He speaks his truth boldly and unapologetically.

Like Jesus' listeners, we may also be tempted to miss the signs of God's presence and life that are right under our noses. We may also be tempted to believe our very limited human perceptions over God's invitation. We may even struggle with

the challenging way God's message is presented to us. But, whatever our response may be, the call remains: if we seek the life that God offers, we have to "eat the flesh of Christ" – which is really saying that we need to allow the whole of Christ's being (Christ's character, values, mission, and message) to become part of our deepest selves, shaping us into true followers of the Jesus way.

How can you allow Christ to fill you even more today?

**Practice for Today:** Whenever we are faced with a challenge like this one from Jesus, we have to respond – either by turning away or by accepting the call and dedicating ourselves to Jesus' life. Today, throughout the day, try and dedicate yourself more fully to Jesus.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have called me, Jesus, I come to you to receive your gift of life.

## **Monday 10 August 2015**

**Reading:** Ephesians 5:1-14

**Reflection:** Jesus spoke in Sunday's Gospel of bringing us into his life. Unfortunately, this life is too often described as something that happens to us in some other, disembodied, place after we die. But, a closer reading of the Gospels shows that this was not Jesus' purpose. Eternal life doesn't happen after we die. It certainly continues then, in some way that we can't fully grasp now, but, it just as certainly begins right here and right now. And it is experienced and expressed in the small details of our daily behaviour.

That's what Paul is getting at in his letter to the Ephesians. It's a grand letter that celebrates the great mystery of Christ's life that has been offered to us. Then, in today's reading, we discover that this mysterious, eternal life, must lead us to be imitators of God, followers of Christ's example. This means that how we speak, how we behave, and what attitudes we embrace are important aspects of God's life in us. Sordidness in our sexual or relational behaviour does not bring life. Greedy attitudes do not bring life. Coarse and foolish talk does not bring life. But, living in the light – with integrity, transparency, and humility – that does bring life.

How does your life reflect the life of Christ?

**Practice for Today:** The standards of God's Reign are high, and we all struggle to meet them. We all fail at times, and we all know the pain and grief that these failures bring. Confession is about recognising that we are meant to be more than our worst, and it is about striving to live our best, most whole, life. Today, make time to confess your brokenness and commit to strive for your best life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Forgive me when I fail to live according to your life-giving ways, O God, and help me to reach for my best life.

## **Tuesday 11 August 2015**

**Reading:** 2 Peter 3:14-18

**Reflection:** Following Jesus does not mean that everything will always be easy and without struggle. On the contrary, we've already seen that even Jesus had to deal with detractors and enemies. There will always be those who feel the need to oppose us because of our faith – and we will still be called to seek to live peacefully with them.

In today's reading, Peter indicates that it isn't only people outside of the Church that we will struggle with. Sometimes even people who share our faith will be the source of grief and pain. Peter refers to those who twist Paul's words because they are hard to understand (who said the Bible was meant to be easy to understand?). Peter suggests two responses when we wrestle with those who disagree with us in matters of faith. Firstly, we are to make sure that we don't get caught up in every new idea and get led away from a firm footing in our relationship with God. This is really about exercising discernment. Secondly, we are to continue to grow in grace and in knowing Jesus, even as we seek to live peacefully with others.

May God give us the discernment we need, and the ability to live peacefully with all.

**Practice for Today:** Discernment, in the New Testament, is not some esoteric gift. It is the fruit of listening carefully to God's Word by studying the whole of the Scriptures. Today, why not try to grow your discernment by spending time reading a section of the Bible you haven't read before?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Teach me to live peacefully and with discernment, O God.

### **Wednesday 12 August 2015**

**Reading:** Jeremiah 31:1-6

**Reflection:** The ministry of Jeremiah the prophet was a difficult one. His prophecies were not well received. He was beaten, and carried off to Egypt against his will. But, in spite of all this, he was not a prophet who only spoke of judgment. Even after facing the often-violent reactions of his detractors, Jeremiah prophesied hope as God directed him.

In today's reading, we saw such a message of hope, in which God promised that God would care for his people in the future time when they would return to their homeland from exile. God makes it clear that, even though they have endured conquest and exile, God has never stopped loving God's people, and God will restore and rebuild the nation. At the heart of this message of hope is the restoration of Israel's worship. Although they had not valued it in the past, God promises to renew their intimate, transforming connection with God. Jeremiah could have been forgiven for refusing to offer such a hopeful message to the people. But, in spite of how he had been treated, he faithfully expresses God's love and forgiveness to them.

Who needs you to show this kind of grace today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most effective ways to learn to show grace to others, and to grow in our ability to love those we struggle to love is to pray for them. Today identify the people you would rather not pray for, and take a moment to place them in God's care.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Give me the grace to love those who view me as an enemy, Jesus.

### **Thursday 13 August 2015**

**Reading:** Acts 6:8-15

**Reflection:** As we begin to prepare our hearts for Sunday's message, we start to explore the gift of wisdom. Today we read about Stephen. He was a simple deacon – a server – in the Church of Acts, but he became the first Christian martyr. His death was one of the catalysts that led to Paul's conversion – which meant that it was a very significant death indeed!

As Stephen ministered to the people around him, he made some religious people very uncomfortable, and so they tried to silence him by debate. What they hadn't anticipated was the wisdom of this young Christ-follower. As the Spirit inspired him, Stephen spoke in such a way that their arguments could not stand. So, in the end, they resorted to deception. They got people to lie about him, and they got him arrested for blasphemy. Yet, even in the face of their lies, the radiance of Stephen's life and person shone out.

It may feel like wisdom is to stay out of trouble and avoid conflict at all costs, but that's not always the case. Sometimes as we follow Christ, wisdom requires us to face those who challenge us, even when it costs us dearly. This takes courage and commitment, and a huge dose of the Spirit's strength. Today, ask God to give you the wisdom that you need.

**Practice for Today:** Wisdom is a gift that comes from listening. As we listen to the Scriptures, to other believers, and to wise teachers, we grow in our own wisdom. Make today a day of attentive listening to those around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I open my ears to listen, teach me your wisdom, O God.

### **Friday 14 August 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 34:9-14

**Reflection:** Although the word 'wisdom' is not mentioned in today's reading, there is no question that the guidelines given here are a recipe for living a wise life. It starts with the fear of God – which can feel like a tough thing for us to hear. It may be more accurate for us to think in terms of deep reverence, respect, and awe. When we fear God in this way – not in a cowering or frightened way – we discover God's wisdom, because as God is revealed to us, we learn the ways of God. To live a "godly," or God-like, life is to speak truthfully, graciously and creatively. It is to embrace what is good while turning away from evil. And it is to live and work for peace.

The Psalm seems to indicate that if we live like this we will never go hungry, but we know that there are deeply faithful people who do. In the famous role-call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 it also mentions that sometimes God's people suffer and die. Yet, when we live in close connection with God and follow God's ways, we do discover that we are sustained and strengthened by resources beyond us, and that, no matter what we may experience, we enjoy the goodness of God's presence and God's empowering Spirit.

What wisdom are you learning from your worship of God?

**Practice for Today:** If wisdom is found through reverence, respect and awe of God, there can be no more effective way to grow in wisdom than to allow the practice of praise to lead us into worship. Today, praise God at every opportunity and allow your praise to teach you more about God and God's ways.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Glorious God, I am in awe of your goodness and grace.

### **Saturday 15 August 2015**

**Reading:** John 4:7-26

**Reflection:** The encounter between Jesus and this Samaritan woman is one of the most challenging and inspiring events in John's Gospel. Here Jesus begins his interaction with her not by speaking about bread, but about water – the other basic necessity for life. Jesus' purpose is not to share a quick drink with her, but to satisfy a deep longing in her soul.

It is important to note that her dubious sexual history may not have been her fault. In a culture where a single woman counted for nothing, she may have worked really hard to find security with a faithful man. But, perhaps, her attempts consistently met with failure. Alternatively, she may have been a victim of the practice of Levirate Marriage, in which women were forced to marry the brothers of their deceased husbands, so that they could bear children to carry on their dead husband's name and inheritance. Whether her multiple relationships are due to her own fault, or the abuse of the men in her life, the scars remain, and she is now an outcast in her village. But, after her conversation with Jesus, she is radically changed. She becomes an evangelist to her neighbours, and knows, perhaps for the first time in her life, the love and acceptance of God.

It may seem strange, in the midst of all this, that worship became part of the conversation. But, somehow this woman knew that relationship with God, and how it is nurtured, is deeply important. Imagine her joy when Jesus revealed that it wasn't about the buildings, but that worship is a matter of the heart. What relief she must have felt when she heard that God was looking for people like her to connect with in love.

How can you drink deep of the living water of God's love and presence today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes the only way we can know the deepest connection with God is in silence. As we become still and allow ourselves to know

that God is God, our souls are able to drink in God's presence and love. Today, take the time to drink deeply and slowly.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I worship you, O God, my soul drinks deep of your living water.

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