

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
16 - 22 August 2015

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

This week the Old Testament reading is the famous story of Solomon's request for wisdom. God offered him anything he wanted, but, facing the daunting responsibility of ruling over God's people, Solomon asked for wisdom. He didn't always act wisely through the years of his reign, but history has mostly remembered Solomon as a wise ruler. The problem we have as we search for wisdom in our own lives and world is that we sometimes mistake wisdom as something that happens in our heads. Wisdom often does include an insightful mind, but there are many very intelligent people who have little wisdom at all. Solomon realised that he would need God's help if he was to live with any wisdom at all.

In the Gospel reading, the Lectionary remains in John 6, with Jesus proclaiming himself as the Bread of Life, and offering life to anyone who will "eat his body and drink his blood". As we have noted, this startling image is meant to convey the idea of taking the nature and Spirit of Jesus into our entire selves so that we are transformed to become like Jesus. As wise as Solomon was, Jesus was far more so, and so if we seek wisdom, we can do no better than to open ourselves to the Spirit of Christ and allow his wisdom to fill us.

One thing that will become clear this week, though, is that wisdom is rooted not so much in what we think, but in how we live. The choices we make, the actions we perform and the relationships we forge can all be foolish or wise. And it's our deep connection with God in Christ that opens us to the wisdom of God, which empowers us to live wisely. May we grow a little wiser as we journey through this week.

### **Sunday 16 August 2015**

**Reading:** Ephesians 5:15-20

**Reflection:** These few verses from Ephesians give a quick and practical guide for wise living. The first sentence sets the scene for what follows: Be careful how you live. This carefulness is a key to wisdom. Carefulness is about slowing down, noticing what is going on around us and within us, and doing the work of reflection that enables us to respond well. When we practice this carefulness, we are more easily able to discern what is wise, and to live accordingly.

Paul reveals in this passage how very practical wisdom is. It's about making the most of the opportunities with which we are presented. It's about acting with thought and soberness, and allowing God's Spirit to fill and guide us. It's about encouraging and celebrating with one another, and it's about being thankful.

These habits are powerful guides for life that free us from the snap judgments and unthinking reactions that cause so much pain.

How can you live more carefully today?

**Practice for Today:** Carefulness, and the wisdom it brings, both require us to slow down and listen. When we take the time to hear what God is saying, and when we carefully observe our world, we grow wise. Why not make today a listening day?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I carefully listen to your Spirit, O God, I grow wise.

### **Monday 17 August 2015**

**Reading:** Acts 6:1-7

**Reflection:** It's comforting to read that the brand new Church of Acts struggled with the same complaints and conflicts that we do today. As the new community grew, and as Gentiles joined the Jews in following Jesus, so disputes and misunderstandings arose. It would have been easy for the apostles just to pick the first group of people they could find to deal with the daily details of running the church, but they didn't do that. They gathered together to work out the wisest solution to the dispute, and then they carefully chose people who were known to be filled with God's Spirit and wisdom.

Even though these men were to be little more than glorified waiters, serving food to those in need, both they and the apostles took this ministry seriously. They recognised that to work in God's name, they would need God's wisdom to guide them. Even the humblest jobs are significant for the church's ministry, and so they, too, need God's equipping and direction. The same applies to our own lives. We don't only need wisdom for the "great" things we need to do. God's wisdom is necessary to navigate the disputes in our relationships, to face the daily frustrations of life, and to manage the small details of each day.

How can God's wisdom help you turn the mundane details of your life into a ministry?

**Practice for Today:** The Scriptures tell us that when we lack wisdom we need only ask God, and it will be provided for us. Today, use the gift of prayer to open yourself to God's wisdom for your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Where I lack wisdom, O God, please guide and teach me.

### **Tuesday 18 August 2015**

**Reading:** Acts 7:9-16

**Reflection:** Yesterday we read about the men who were chosen to distribute food to those in need in the new Christian community. Today, we jump into the middle of the speech of one of these men – Stephen. You will remember that Stephen was arrested on the basis of false accusations because of the impact he was making on people in Christ's name. When he was asked to answer to the charges,

he launched into a long sermon, narrating the history of God's saving acts on behalf of God's people. He sought to demonstrate how the Scriptures point to Jesus, and how the life and work of Jesus was consistent with God's saving work.

But, in the middle of this sermon, Stephen points back to another servant of God who was given tremendous wisdom so that God could save God's people through him – Joseph. Like Stephen, Joseph was accused and betrayed by others and found himself under arrest. But, unlike Stephen, Joseph ended up ruling over Pharaoh's household and helping Egypt through a severe famine. Stephen tells this story to remind his hearers that God often uses those who seem ill equipped or inappropriate to accomplish God's purposes. And, although the religious leaders didn't recognise it, God was doing the same thing through Stephen. When he was martyred, Paul was watching, and this event became an important part of his journey to faith.

In what unlikely ways might God want to use you? Who are the unlikely ones that God might be using to speak to you?

**Practice for Today:** God does not need only those with great influence or position in the work of God's Reign. God only needs those who are open to God's wisdom and willing to make a contribution, however small. Today, why not recommit yourself to be used for God's sake?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I offer myself to you, O God, for you to use me as you will.

### **Wednesday 19 August 2015**

**Reading:** 1 Kings 8:1-21

**Reflection:** This past Sunday we saw how Solomon prayed for God's wisdom to rule God's people. He saw himself as the first step in the fulfillment of God's promise to David. He was the first of his father's descendants to take the throne, and he felt the responsibility to continue in his father's footsteps. David had wanted to build a Temple for God, but God had not allowed that. Now Solomon completes the work. There are a number of reasons why he may have been so committed to doing this. Apart from the obvious desire to have a place to worship God and remind the people of God's presence, the Temple also legitimated Solomon as David's rightful heir. As he completed his father's work, he would more easily be accepted by the people, and would be able to claim to be following in his father's ways. It was a very wise move.

This Sunday we get a glimpse into Solomon's heart. Although he did not always stay faithful to God, when the Temple was dedicated Solomon prayed a moving prayer. He asked for God to keep David's descendants on the throne, but he also asked God to answer the prayers that were offered in this Temple, whether spoken by a Jew or by a foreigner. However mixed his motives, and however weak his commitment may have become in the end, the wisdom of Solomon was rooted in his faith that God was the source of life for God's people.

In what ways can you dedicate yourself to be a Temple for God's presence – both for yourself and for others?

**Practice for Today:** As we seek to live in the wisdom that comes from our connectedness with God, we need to constantly open ourselves to the guidance and inspiration of God's Spirit. Today invite God's Spirit to fill you again, and seek to be a Temple for God's presence and glory.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Make my life a dwelling for your Spirit, O God.

### **Thursday 20 August 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 34:15-22

**Reflection:** This Psalm resonates strongly with Solomon's prayer which you may read this Sunday in church. It speaks of how God watches over the righteous and listens to their cries for help. God rescues God's people and remains close to those who are broken. Though righteous people experience many troubles, God is always there for them, and will always protect them. But, the wicked are punished and rejected by God. It's a clear-cut picture that fits the Old Testament worldview, and reveals a God of grace and love in those terms. It's important to notice that God is revealed to be deeply concerned for those who suffer, especially at the hand of other people who exploit or do violence to them. God is always "on the side" of those who suffer, and always "set against" those who cause suffering to others.

But, as we read this Psalm, we need to remember that we are all a combination of these two kinds of people. Sometimes we are the righteous who suffer for justice and goodness. But, sometimes we are the wicked ones who bring suffering on others through our greed, selfishness, anger, impatience or rejection. At the time of writing this Psalm, people may have been seen as all good or all wicked, but Jesus made it clear that we all have wickedness in us that deserves punishment. Yet, the mercy of God is such that we are not punished, but are called to life, freedom and forgiveness.

Where are you living as a righteous person today? And where are you wicked?

**Practice for Today:** The only appropriate response to God's presence and grace is to confess the wickedness in us. When we admit how we have brought suffering on ourselves and others, we can be forgiven and changed. Righteous people are not those who have done no wrong, but those who work to heal the wrong they do. Confession is an integral part of this process.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Wherever there is wickedness in me, O God, please forgive me and heal me.

### **Friday 21 August 2015**

**Reading:** Joshua 22:10-20

**Reflection:** When the Israelites finally reached the Promised Land after their years of wandering in the wilderness, they started making plans to settle down.

One tribe and half of another decided that they liked the land to the East of the Jordan, and so they asked Joshua if they could settle there. Joshua agreed on condition that they cross the Jordan with the other tribes and help them to conquer the land. Then, when they were ready to settle down, they could return to the East bank and make their homes there. But, when that time came, the tribe and a half felt a little insecure, and worried that the Jordan could become a dividing wall between them and the other Israelites. And so they built an altar as a reminder to their ancestors and those of the others tribes that they were all one. This plan almost backfired when the other tribes heard of this altar and thought the people on the Eastern side of the Jordan had abandoned God and turned to idolatry. It took some good communication, and the willingness of Joshua to listen first, to stop all out war between the tribes.

It's easy to allow our assumptions and misunderstandings of others to cause friction, anger and division between us. But, wisdom calls for us to listen, understand and reach out to one another in love. Then, as we learn to know each other better, we can pray together and walk together, avoiding the prejudice that so often causes conflict.

Who needs you to listen, understand and pray for them today?

**Practice for Today:** When we reach out to others with curiosity and the quest to understand, we discover common ground that frees us to connect more deeply. Today try to reach out to others - especially those who are very different from you in some way.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have reached out to me, O God, so I reach out to others in understanding and in love.

### **Saturday 22 August 2015**

**Reading:** Luke 11:5-13

**Reflection:** A couple of weeks ago we read Matthew's version of the "ask, seek, knock" teaching of Jesus. While Matthew places this teaching in the midst of a series of lessons about living well, Luke roots his version solidly in the practice of prayer. The parable Jesus tells about the man who wakes his friend to get food for a visitor is one of many that emphasise the importance of persistence in prayer. There are some problems with how we have usually interpreted this teaching, though.

I have heard many preachers speak about prayer as asking God for things (as in "ask, seek, knock"). The persistence, then, is about showing God that we're committed to receiving and keeping our prayer going until we get what we want. It's convenient to ignore the difference in the ending of Luke's version. Matthew says, "How much more will your heavenly Father give *good gifts*..." Luke says, "...the *Holy Spirit*..." It seems likely that Luke was clarifying what Matthew is saying. The "good things" in question are not the latest fashionable gadget, nice house or fast car. They are the gifts of God's Spirit – the presence and activity of God in our hearts and lives. We persist in prayer not because we want more stuff,

but because only by constantly submitting ourselves to God in prayer are we changed into those who are filled and led by God's Spirit. The goal of our prayer is not health, wealth and happiness, but transformation into Christlikeness.

What part of your life needs you to stay committed to prayer so that you can be changed?

**Practice for Today:** It's important to remember that prayer is not only about requesting things - whether material goods or personal transformation. Prayer is also about acknowledging, in praise and thanksgiving, who God is. When we immerse ourselves in a vision of God, we are changed into God's likeness. Allow your practice of praise to change you today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I gaze on your glory, O God, so I am changed to reflect you.

---

Written by John van de Laar © Copyright 2015 Sacredise.

Readings "Reprinted from *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings*, copyright © 2005  
Consultation on Common Texts ([www.commontexts.org](http://www.commontexts.org))

***If you would like to receive these devotions for yourself, please go to [sacredise.com/daily](http://sacredise.com/daily)***