

# ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
06 - 12 September 2015

## **Thought for the Week:**

Most of us who are reading this have access to technology that qualifies us as, at the very least, "middle class." This can make talking about God's passionate concern for the poor more than a little uncomfortable. Part of the problem is that we tend to frame the conversation in either/or terms. If God is "on the side" of the poor, then God must be "against" the wealthy. Or, if God "blesses" the wealthy, then God must be "punishing" the poor. There are theologians on both sides of this debate, and, as long as we keep viewing things this way, the debate is not going to end soon.

But, the Scriptures do not really enter this debate at all. There is no question that God loves and welcomes whoever seeks relationship with God. There is also no question that God seeks justice wherever there is injustice - which means that where people suffer, God will send prophets and activists to work for healing, restoration, and transformation. The challenge for us is to learn to share God's passion for the poor, and to become more and more comfortable with the tough conversations around bringing justice into our world.

One thing we cannot avoid, if we are serious about following Christ in our daily lives, is becoming involved in God's work of justice and compassion. What this might mean for us practically is part of this week's journey.

## **Sunday 06 September 2015**

**Reading:** Mark 7:24-37

**Reflection:** Today's reading is a tough one. The way Jesus treats the woman in this story seems most uncharacteristic, and really quite rude. She is a Gentile, and at first Jesus refers to her as a dog! There are a number of different ways to interpret this response. Some feel that Jesus was testing her to see whether she had the faith to stick to her guns. Some feel that Jesus was pretending to treat her badly to highlight the racism of his own people. Others believe that Jesus had a transforming moment where this woman made him realise that his mission was not just to the Jews. Whatever we may believe about this encounter, what becomes clear is that Jesus finally welcomes this poor, Gentile woman and heals her daughter. After this, he then returns to a Jewish region and heals a deaf-mute man. It seems pretty clear that the Gospel writer wants us to recognise that Jesus was radically inclusive in his ministry.

The problem with injustice is that it always includes some and excludes others. This means that one of the most powerful things we can do to bring about justice in our world is to become radically inclusive like Jesus.

Who do you need to welcome and include today?

**Practice for Today:** Being inclusive doesn't mean that we have to be close friends with everyone - that just isn't humanly possible. But, if we treat everyone we meet with kindness and respect, and take time to recognise their basic humanity, we are living as welcoming, inclusive Christ-followers. Try it today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Help me to recognise the humanity, and the divine image, in everyone I meet, O God.

## **Monday 07 September 2015**

**Reading:** Hebrews 11:29-12:2

**Reflection:** It takes faith to follow Jesus, especially when we recognise God's call to justice in an unjust world. It can be tempting to believe that faith is a guarantee of health, wealth and happiness. Up to verse 34, Hebrews 11 seems to be saying that such a view of faith is correct. But, then from verse 35 we read of how some of God's servants were tortured, imprisoned, mocked, persecuted, falsely accused and even killed - by faith! The power of faith here was not in keeping God's people from harm. It was in giving them the courage to risk harm for the sake of justice and love.

The writer then turns, in Chapter 12, to his readers. All of these faithful servants of God are now witnesses to our lives - the "Church Triumphant" as theologians call them. They cheer us on and pray for us as we continue the race of faith. In response, we are called to stay faithful, to release what could trip us up, and to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. It is his death and resurrection that strengthens us to face suffering for the sake of our faith, and to believe that our lives can make a contribution, however small, to building a world of justice.

What sacrifice is God asking you to embrace for the sake of God's Reign? How can you keep your eyes on Jesus as you respond to God's call today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the best ways to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is to continually remember his life, death and resurrection through the practice of praise. Today, offer praise to Christ at every opportunity.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** For your life of love and justice - that conquered death - I praise you, Jesus.

## **Tuesday 08 September 2015**

**Reading:** Psalm 73:1-20

**Reflection:** One of the biggest challenges to faith - and to living lives of justice and love each day - is the "attraction" of evil. In a world in which we prioritise efficiency, personal benefit, and effectiveness, it can sometimes feel like faith doesn't "work". We would love to be able to just "plug in" prayers when we need solutions or provision and know that the answers would pop out, as if from a vending machine. But, that's not what happens.

Then, we may look around us at people who seem to have no faith and no concern for the consequences of their actions on others. They may have more money than they could ever use. They may seem to be popular and comfortable and unperturbed by life's struggles. And then we may find ourselves questioning the value of faith - as the Psalmist does in today's reading. When seeking justice makes our life tougher, more complicated and more painful, it can feel like it's too much, and we may want to forget God's call and embrace selfishness and expediency.

What today's Psalm shows is that these feelings are natural and very common. But the Psalm also shows that, when we allow God's perspective to speak to us, a whole different picture emerges. When we recognise the goodness, beauty and truth of God's Reign, we realise that how we live makes a difference, not just now, but for eternity. We also see that, in this eternal perspective, wickedness is actually very short-lived.

How can you open yourself to God's eternal perspective today?

**Practice for Today:** Even though you may be in a place where living out your faith is hard or painful, you can find strength and joy by giving thanks for God's presence and God's Spirit who sustains you. Try to maintain a thankful heart throughout today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, O God, for your eternal, life-giving Reign, which sustains me even today.

### **Wednesday 09 September 2015**

**Reading:** Matthew 17:14-21

**Reflection:** You cannot help but feel for the poor disciples in today's reading. Jesus had gone up the mountain where he had been transfigured. Only Peter, James and John had seen this, but in the meantime, the other disciples were struggling with a boy who was suffering from severe seizures. They must have been surprised by their inability to drive out the evil that was causing this, because they had been sent out by Jesus before and had been successful in such situations. But, this time, nothing seemed to be working.

Then Jesus returned, and brought the hoped-for healing. When the disciples asked him why they had been unsuccessful, he told them that they didn't have enough faith. In the church, this statement has sometimes been levelled at people who are suffering when so-called "healers" have failed to cure them. But, this is a misuse of Jesus' words. Note, he doesn't challenge the faith of either the boy or the father, but of his own disciples. And then Jesus tells them that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. I doubt Jesus meant for this to be understood literally and dramatically. Rather, it would have been meant rather like the old saying: "How do you move a mountain? One stone at a time!" It takes faith to stay committed to those who are suffering, especially when it doesn't seem to be making any difference. That's why some manuscripts include the last remark that "this kind of demon can only be cast out by prayer and fasting." Prayer and

fasting require commitment, patience and the confidence that change can happen. Perhaps if the disciples had been just a little more patient their efforts would have borne fruit.

Where do you need to exercise a little more patience and commitment in your following of Jesus?

**Practice for Today:** Commitment is a daily choice that can be affirmed through prayers of dedication. We are used to singing and praying words of dedication in worship on Sundays, but today, you may want to hold a prayer of dedication in your heart as you commit to follow Jesus a little more closely, patiently and faithfully.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** In all that I say and think and do, I dedicate myself to you, Jesus.

### **Thursday 10 September 2015**

**Reading:** Joshua 2:1-14

**Reflection:** As the people of Israel prepared to enter and settle in the Promised Land, Joshua sent two spies out to get information about the large fortified cities that would resist them. In Jericho the spies were assisted by a prostitute named Rahab. Some scholars have noted that her clientele must have been officials and nobles from the king's court, because she knew a lot about the Jericho army's movements and the socio-cultural conditions of the city and surrounding country. Whatever the case, she seems to have felt no loyalty to her own people, and seems to have been more than willing to throw her lot in with the invaders. But, here is where she took an immense risk. She was a woman with no power and no means of supporting herself, it seems, other than to sell her body. Yet, she trusts in the integrity of these two spies. If they had betrayed her, or forgotten her, her life would have been over. As it turned out, they were as good as their word, and she and her family were saved. She too had remained true to her word and had not betrayed the spies. And the result was that she became part of the nation of Israel, finally marrying a prominent Israelite man, and becoming the ancestor of both King David and Jesus.

This story reveals the far-reaching impact that a life of integrity can have both in bringing justice to others (in connection with last Sunday) and in revealing God's grace and compassion to others, as we will see this coming Sunday.

How can you commit, a little more, to a life of integrity today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most important elements of integrity is to be united in what we say, think and do. Sometimes, though, it can be hard to live this personal unity. If there are any areas of your life where your integrity is less than you want it to be, confess that to God, and receive God's forgiveness and the help of God's Spirit.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Whenever I fail to live with integrity, O God, please forgive me and help me to think, speak and act as one.

## **Friday 11 September 2015**

**Reading:** James 2:17-26

**Reflection:** This Sunday the Lectionary will be challenging us to live lives of integrity. It should go without saying that Christ-followers should be people of integrity, but unfortunately, this is not always how we're seen - or how we live. Integrity is when our words, actions, attitudes and thoughts are all one. In today's reading James applies integrity specifically to the life of faith. There is no separation or competition between faith and actions. If we claim to believe something, it must impact how we live - or it isn't faith at all. Abraham and Rahab both put their faith into concrete actions that made the world of difference, not just to them, but to others.

It's tempting to think of faith as something that happens in our minds - accepting certain ideas or "spiritual laws" to be true. Faith, in this sense, requires no specific actions. In the light of James' words, it's easy to see how shallow this view of faith is. But, when faith becomes the basis for our lives, it impacts everything – our use of our time, our resources, our abilities, our choices about what we eat or wear or drive, our treatment of other people and even of ourselves – and everything becomes oriented around the values and purposes of God's Reign.

In what ways does your life reflect your faith in concrete action?

**Practice for Today:** One of the best ways to check what kind of faith we have is to examine our prayers. When our prayers are all about making our lives more comfortable, we probably still have some work to do. But, when we pray for God's grace and love to sustain others - and when we are willing to be the answer to our prayers - we are praying with true faith. Try it today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May your grace and love touch the world through me today, Jesus.

## **Saturday 12 September 2015**

**Reading:** Matthew 21:23-32

**Reflection:** Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel speaks about integrity in two ways. To begin with, there is the debate around authority between Jesus and the religious leaders. This confrontation happened just after Jesus had thrown the moneychangers and animal sellers out of the Temple. The leaders wanted to know whether Jesus really had a valid right to do what he did, so they questioned his authority. But, Jesus didn't answer their question. He expected the integrity of his life to speak.

Then, there's the story about the two sons. One says he will obey his father and does not. The other says he won't obey and does. Jesus points out that it's the one who acts, not the one who speaks, that actually obeys. Then, he points out that it is not the religious people – who have all the words, but none of the actions of faith – who are entering God's Reign, but the "sinners". Remember this is not about what happens after death, but about God's Reign in *this* world. This is

where the integrity of faith really counts – in the extent to which we embrace God's Reign in our actions, and not just our words.

In what ways is your commitment to God's Reign seen in your life?

**Practice for Today:** The Gospel always calls for a response. This week we have been challenged to embrace and live out God's compassion for the poorest among us, and we have begun to hear the call to live with integrity. Today would be a good time to decide how you will respond. Why not choose faith, compassion and obedience?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I hear your call to live with grace and justice, O God, and I offer myself to you in response.

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