

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

04 - 10 October 2015

Thought for the Week:

This Sunday, if one of the Lectionary readings was used in your worship, it may have struck you how concerned God is about relationships. This week the readings ranged from God's creation of men and women to be companions for one another, to the pain and brokenness of divorce; from Job's struggle to be faithful to God and his bitter wife, to Jesus who humbled himself in order to serve human beings, whom he considers his brothers and sisters. Today's readings are just a fraction of the biblical teaching on relationships. For God, in the end, it all boils down to loving God and loving one another.

But this isn't always as easy as it sounds. People can be extremely difficult to love. People can be antagonistic, selfish and arrogant. People can disagree with us and mock us for our faith. Some of this very human sinfulness was reflected in the disciples as they rebuked those who brought children for Jesus' blessing. They probably thought they were helping Jesus - protecting him from trivial things. But, they were getting beyond themselves, and they needed to learn the humility, spontaneity and openness of children – which is why Jesus tells them that his followers must learn to receive God's Reign like children.

You can't follow Jesus without facing the challenge to be in relationships. Our families, friends, strangers, companions in faith, and even our enemies, are all included in God's love, and in God's call for us to love. The truth is, it is only when we learn to embrace love to this extent that we really find the abundant life that God desires for us.

Sunday 04 October 2015

Reading: Mark 10:2-16

Reflection: It's interesting that, in all the debate around sexuality in the church, we have ignored Jesus' very strong words about divorce. For Jesus, remarriage after divorce is the same as adultery – yet few Christians make an issue of divorce and remarriage. I must confess: I am very glad that we have chosen the way of grace in dealing with this very painful human reality.

For Jesus, as always, the issue is about more than just the actual act of divorce. It was about what goes on in our hearts. When two people commit to each other, they are meant to become one. But, for too many couples, self-interest and self-protection trumps their intimacy and union. This is what it means to be what Jesus called "hard hearted". Jesus' words, then, don't just apply to breakdown in marriage relationships. They apply to every relationship. Jesus challenges every one of us on our hard heartedness – our tendency to protect ourselves and our own interests at the expense of our relationships, be it with friends, family, or companions in faith.

This is also why children become such an important part of this passage. Children are not saints, but they are openhearted. They love easily, and give themselves easily. It's only as we grow and get hurt that we start to close and protect our hearts. But, in God's Reign, a child-like open-heartedness is not an option. It's the way of grace and love.

How can you open your heart a little more today?

Practice for Today: The only way to heal a hard heart is to allow it to be broken. We break our hearts by acknowledging our self-interest and self-protectiveness, and by choosing to become more vulnerable to God and others. This means being willing to embrace the hurt – and the healing – that love always brings. Today, spend time in heart-breaking confession and ask God to help you open your heart to love.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Break my self-protective heart, O God, and open me to love.

Monday 05 October 2015

Reading: Job 8:1-22

Reflection: We don't know whether the people who spoke to Job in his suffering were supposed to be friends or not, but if they were, Job had no need of enemies! As he grieves and laments his suffering, Job continues to maintain his innocence. He has done his best to be faithful to God, and he feels like God is treating him unfairly. The Bible is not afraid of such honest grief. If we can't give our pain and anger to God, what are we to do with it?

But, Bildad feels differently. From his very comfortable perspective, Job's suffering must be God's punishment for some sin. Job's children have died, and Bildad can only think that they must have done something to deserve it. As for Job – if he would just admit his sinfulness, then God would forgive and heal him, and he could return to a life of blessing.

Bildad reflects the worst of self-righteous faith. It's easy, when things are going well for us, to look at others and blame them for their own suffering. It's comforting to think that bad things only happen to bad people. That way, we have no responsibility to care for those who suffer. We only have to call them to live righteously (as we obviously do). But, the book of Job shouts a strong and important message. Sometimes the innocent suffer. Sometimes people get sick through no fault of their own. Sometimes hard working people become poor and can find no way out. And, as followers of Jesus, our task is not to shout religious platitudes, but to step into the suffering of others and walk with them, so that they can know God's grace and healing through us. How can you be the compassion of Christ to someone today?

Practice for Today: To engage regularly in acts of service and compassion is a transforming spiritual discipline. It softens our hearts, connects us with others, and brings healing into our world. And it's not hard to be compassionate. It's just a choice to be kind and open, rather than closed and defensive. Try to act with openhearted kindness toward everyone you encounter today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have served me, O Christ, so I open my heart to serve those around me.

Tuesday 06 October 2015

Reading: Psalm 112

Reflection: Today's Psalm is another song of joy and confidence in God. Once again we see the call to obey God's commands, and the assurance of goodness when we do. Many of these celebratory Psalms remind us that, even though every life has pain, God's ways do open us to joy and connection in good times and bad.

One thing that stands out in this particular reading is the element of relationships. It's not just that people who follow God's ways know God's presence and goodness. Their children, their communities, and even their enemies are different because of them. Godly people set their children up for success, according to this Psalm. This is logical when we realise that God's commands teach us to be self-aware and reflective, and also more connected and respectful of others – which are the ingredients that make a full and meaningful life. So, if this is what we're teaching our children, they will benefit.

Godly people are generous and compassionate. This is a basic mark of true followers of Christ, and it brings great benefit to the whole community. Finally, godly people can face their enemies confidently. This is because they are focussed on reconciliation and forgiveness, not revenge and violence.

Again, none of these characteristics guarantee a life of peace and comfort, but they do ensure that our relationships will be as strong and stable and joyful as possible. And that's a guarantee of a fulfilling and joyful life, no matter what our circumstances. How are your relationships today?

Practice for Today: When we can celebrate our relationships - with our families, our communities, and even those with whom we disagree and struggle - we never forget the joy and blessing that these relationships bring. Today, praise God for all the people who bless you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For friends and family that share your love with me, I praise you, O God.

Wednesday 07 October 2015

Reading: Matthew 5:27-36

Reflection: You will probably recognise some of the elements of today's reading. That's because last week Mark's Gospel included

the parts about removing certain body parts if they are causing us to sin. Today's reading from Matthew puts those same words in a very different context. In this section from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking about relationships – specifically the difference between love and lust, between faithfulness and expediency.

It is easy to build our lives around what comes easily to us – our lusts and convenience. It feels easier to ignore the humanity of another person and make them an object for our own pleasure, than to control our drives in order to respect them. It feels easier to end a relationship and move on than to do the hard work of conflict resolution, self-reflection, and forgiveness. But, the truth is neither lust nor expediency bring life to others or to us. When our relationships are nothing more than a function of our own personal needs, we undermine the humanity – the unique value and personhood – of others. But, we also lose something of our own humanity. That's why Jesus says that, rather than try to persuade one another with empty vows, we should rather learn to live with integrity and value one another in committed relationships.

Are you ready to do the tough work of relationship-building today?

Practice for Today: The practice of gathering with others in worship teaches us how hard, and how important it is to learn to live together with people who are different. You can't be in community without facing your own brokenness, or learning to navigate the brokenness of others. This is why becoming a welcoming person who chooses to commit to others is such a life-giving gift. Try to be a person like this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Though it's not easy, I choose to honour and welcome those around me, in your name, O God.

Thursday 08 October 2015

Reading: Deuteronomy 5:1-21

Reflection: It may seem strange, as we move from a focus on relationships this week to our response to suffering next week, to be reading the Ten Commandments. Yet relationships are what the commandments are about, and they also teach us how to remove unnecessary suffering from our world. Notice how the giving of the

law flows out of God's covenant – God's committed relationship – with God's people. The truth is that we cause suffering when we ignore our relationships with others, and we bring healing when we live in respectful, loving relationships. The Ten Commandments are simple guidelines for building strong relationships with God and with one another.

The prohibition against the worship of idols may sound like the fear of an egotistical God, but it isn't. God knows that when we set our hearts on things that don't satisfy, and when we find meaning in things that are ultimately meaningless, we end up empty and broken. We need to worship not for God's sake, but for our own. As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God."

The other commandments are all about treating one another with kindness and respect. When we fight, covet, deceive and steal from one another, we all suffer. But, when we choose to give, love and respect, we are all healed. There is wisdom in these commandments, and just by living by them, we contribute to the healing of the world. Which commandment do you most need to follow today?

Practice for Today: The heart of the commandments is to love God and love one another. In order to live like this we need God's strength. One way we can learn to live the commandments better is to pray for ourselves and others along the lines of these laws. Try to make today a day of constant prayer.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me to love and respect others, and, through my loving life, teach them to do the same.

Friday 09 October 2015

Reading: Hebrews 4:1-11

Reflection: The idea of rest has always been attractive to human beings. In our multi-tasking, always-connected, always-busy world, many people long to be able to have a few moments to disconnect, stop running and really rest. In spiritual terms, rest has always been a metaphor for salvation. The book of Hebrews offers suggestions for how we can find rest in both senses of the word.

The writer has the original quest of the Israelites to reach the Promised Land in mind as he writes this passage, but he makes it very clear that God's rest is far more than this. That's why he speaks about Joshua and how he was unable to give the people true rest. Rather the rest he means is that of faith - of trusting in God's ways. It's the rest of Sabbath, based in God's own rest at the end of the creative process. It's the rest of hearts that have not become hard.

How do these things lead us to rest? Sabbath is not just stopping work. It's regularly remembering that we are not ultimately able to care for ourselves, but must trust in God's rhythms for the world and for our lives. Hard hearts cannot rest because they cannot trust. They believe that they must hoard all they can to be safe, and they end up being cold and without compassion. Hard hearts bring suffering on themselves and on others through their self-protectiveness. But, when we trust in God's ways, we learn to share, to love and to bring life to others. This means that, not only do we let go of our stress, we contribute to greater rest in other people's lives, too. How can you embrace God's rest today?

Practice for Today: Sometimes the thing we need to learn most is to let go. Taking stock of our lives and letting go of what is unnecessary is an important spiritual practice. Today, spend a moment in silence and rest, and then go through the day looking for the things that you may need to release. When you find anything that is unnecessary and weighs you down (tasks, objects, attitudes), let it go as soon as possible.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Today I trust in your rest, O God, and I release what keeps me from it.

Saturday 10 October 2015

Reading: Amos 3:13-4:5

Reflection: Today's reading, which prepares us for facing the problem of suffering tomorrow, is a tough one to read, but it's very relevant to today's world. The prophet Amos was strong in proclaiming that the worship of God's people had to be connected with actions of compassion and justice. But, they weren't listening. There were massive disparities between rich and poor. Wealthy employers were exploiting labourers. Rich people lived in huge

mansions and enjoyed luxury, while they ignored the suffering of the needy. Yet, these same wealthy people were regular worshippers. They made their sacrifices, prayed their prayers, and gave their tithes, but none of it changed their hearts. Amos warned them that, unless they changed, they would be conquered and they would lose everything – which is exactly what happened.

This sounds a lot like our world today! Across the world contemporary Amoses are warning the wealthy that, unless they begin to consider the needs of the poor, and work for justice, they, too, will end up losing everything.

This all sounds very depressing, until we realise that we already have the solution. When Jesus calls us to live according to the principles of God's Reign, he means that each of us, as we are able, are called to share, to serve, to give, to work for justice and to ensure that our worship is not just lip service, but a genuine life-changing offering of ourselves to God. When we answer Jesus' call, we become part of the healing of this hurting world. How can you make a contribution today?

Practice for Today: The act of giving is just as important for the giver as it is for the receiver. It softens our hearts and teaches us simplicity. That's why giving is an integral part of God's Reign and of our worship. It's not giving in order to receive. It's giving in order to be free from our addiction to "things", and to find the life that generosity and simplicity brings to others and to us. Make today a generous, giving day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I offer you my whole self, and all I possess, O God.

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