

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
08 - 14 November 2015

Thought for the Week:

After last week's focus on love, it is appropriate that the theme for this week is faith. Faith, or trust, and love always go together. When we love, we place our trust in our beloved, and as we live in faith, so our capacity for love grows. But, there is also a third dimension to this equation, and that is power. Both faith and love have a lot to say about how we understand and use our power. It doesn't matter whether we have much power or little, if it is not rooted in faith and love, it becomes destructive.

It is all too easy for us to try and use our faith to control our circumstances. It's easy to slip into thinking that, if we can just muster enough "faith", we can avoid suffering, trauma and tragedy. When we allow ourselves to be seduced by this kind of thinking, we end up with something that may look like faith, but is actually far from it. What we're actually doing is putting our trust in our own ability to manipulate God or other people or circumstances in our favour. But, this is a very dangerous place to put our faith. The quest for control is futile. The world is always beyond our ability to understand or steer.

The legal experts in the Gospel reading for this Sunday lived with this kind of false faith, and Jesus criticised them for it. Real faith is more like the poor widow who gave her all as an offering to God. This week we will explore how to let go of our need to control the world, and be open to real faith that leads us to life.

Sunday 08 November 2015

Reading: Mark 12:38-44

Reflection: Today's reading contrasts two kinds of faith. On the one hand, there are the legal experts of Jesus' day. They had power and they knew how to use it. They made a display of their wealth and status, and they ordered the world according to their preferences. In

the process, they became cold and heartless. Their need to manipulate and control the world meant that they would even oppress and harm those who were poor and vulnerable. The quest for control always does this. It's hard to show compassion for others when you're intent on keeping the world at bay. When everything needs to be managed, it becomes very difficult to be open to the unpredictable needs of others.

Then, on the other hand, there is the poor widow. Although she had every reason to try and control what little she had, she didn't do that. Instead of hoarding her small treasures, she gave freely and generously to God's work. She didn't even use the corruption of the religious leaders as an excuse not to give. Instead, she placed her life in God's hand, knowing that she was unable to control the world, and she kept her heart open to the unpredictable rhythms of life. This did not mean that she would no longer be poor. It simply meant that she refused to allow her poverty to close her heart and rob her of life.

Which kind of faith do you have more of: the "faith" that seeks to control, or the faith that gives and trusts? How can you embrace more of the latter?

Practice for Today: If there is anything that expresses a desire to trust God and place our lives in God's hands, it is the act of giving. It's hard to give when we believe that it's up to us to sustain our lives. But, as we give, our hearts learn to trust in God's care and strength, no matter what circumstances we may face. Try to make today a day of generous giving.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I give of my time, talents and treasures, O God, I entrust my life to you.

Monday 09 November 2015

Reading: 1 Timothy 5:1-8

Reflection: For many of us faith has come to be seen as an individual thing that is only between God and us. We may not realise, though, that the Bible knows nothing of such individualistic faith. In the Scriptures, our relationship with God always drives us

into relationships with one another. When we resist the connection that faith offers, we actually harm ourselves and those around us.

God's care and provision do not magically drop out heaven. God always works through human beings. This means that faith involves trusting in one another, as well as trusting in God. This is why today's passage focuses so much on how we treat each other. When we ignore one another and live isolated lives, we all suffer. We lose respect for one another, we compete for limited resources, and we ignore the needs of those around us. That the writer says that we have "denied the true faith." But, when we allow our faith to connect us, we become like an extended family. We respect one another as brothers and sisters, and we take care of one another, providing for each other's needs. In this way, we become channels of God's grace and provision for each other – just like the church in Acts 2:42-47.

How can you allow your faith to connect you with others, and teach you to be a channel of God's grace and provision?

Practice for Today: It's common to use prayer as a means of showing care and support for one another. But, if all we do is pray, this can sometimes be a way to avoid our responsibility to show compassion in practical ways. This means that, as we pray, it's always good to ask God if there's some way we can be the answer to our own prayers for others. Today, show compassion by praying for others, but also in actions of care and service.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me the faith that trusts in you, O God, and that connects me with others in shared compassion.

Tuesday 10 November 2015

Reading: Genesis 24:11-27

Reflection: The story of today's reading is beautiful. A humble servant of Abraham, who has been given the task of finding a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, returns to the land of Abraham's family. Here he must seek out a woman and convince her to return with him to a foreign land to marry a man whom she has never met. Even in those days this must have been a daunting task.

If you read the verses before those set for today, you'll see that this servant was doubtful of his success. He knew that the chances were high that any woman he found would be unwilling to leave her home and go with him. Yet, he places his mission in God's hands. Throughout the story he prays and praises God as he trusts in God's guidance, and follows what he knows of God's ways. Even the criteria he uses for selecting Isaac's wife are interesting – he seeks out a woman who will willingly serve him and his animals. Although we are told that Rebekah was beautiful, this is not his primary focus. Rather he looks for character – a mark of his commitment to his faith.

His desire for a sign is typical of the faith of the time, but it is not always a good way to make our decisions. It's also important to remember that life does not always work out as smoothly as this. As we seek to follow Christ we must recognise that sometimes we walk blindly, with only the example of Christ's grace and servanthood to follow. Yet, usually when we look back, we will see that God's presence and guidance has been with us. How can you entrust your life's mission to God like this?

Practice for Today: This servant kept his eyes focussed strongly on God. In order to do this, he used the practice of praise. He trusts in God's unfailing love. He trusts in God's guidance and care for his task. And, when he finds Rebekah, he responds in praise. Today, allow the practice of praise to build your faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your love is unfailing, and your presence is always with me.

Wednesday 11 November 2015

Reading: Luke 4:16-30

Reflection: Jesus knew that when he returned to his hometown, they would be unable to accept him for who he was. But, he went anyway, giving them the chance to decide for themselves. His reputation was already growing in the region, so he knew he would eventually have to face those who had known him as a child, but he also knew that they would find his mission offensive.

As he taught in the synagogue, he used Isaiah's prophecy to describe his mission. He chose a messianic passage, which refers to the coming of God's Reign (without using those words). It references the "Year of the Lord's favour" which, many scholars believe, referred to the Jubilee – the celebration every fifty years in which economic and political equality was restored. The people of Jesus' town did not seem to have a problem with this. What did get them angry, though, was when Jesus told them that God often worked through foreigners and Gentiles, and that the same would be the case with him. They wanted God to be "theirs" and to operate according to their cultural and political agendas. It was when Jesus revealed that God was not going to do that – that God's mission was surprising and included the outcasts – that they tried to destroy Jesus.

It's easy to fall into the trap of using our faith to further our own agendas, instead of following God's inclusive grace. And, when we see God working through those whom we feel are unworthy, we sometimes use our faith as an excuse for our anger and aggression. How can you release your own agenda and submit to God's a little more today?

Practice for Today: One of the first steps toward living with a true faith that submits to God's ways is to acknowledge our own agendas. Once we have identified the ways that we try to use our faith to manipulate God and others according to our own desires, we can confess this, and then make the choice to submit to God's ways. Today, whenever you find yourself getting angry because you aren't getting your own way, take time to confess.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Forgive me, O God, when I try to impose my agendas on you and others.

Thursday 12 November 2015

Reading: Daniel 4:4-18

Reflection: It's interesting how those with power and wealth can sometimes be plagued with fears and doubts (as can we all). Nebuchadnezzar was like that. Living in comfort in his palace, he was nevertheless terrified of losing his position. His fears manifested in a terrifying dream, where he saw himself as a tall tree which was

cut down. When he called all his counsellors to explain the dream, only Daniel was able to offer an interpretation. Or perhaps only Daniel had the courage to tell the king what he didn't want to hear. Daniel's message was really a warning for the king to be careful not to allow his pride and power to get the better of him. If you continue reading, though, you will discover that Nebuchadnezzar failed to listen to Daniel, and he was brought low, experiencing a period of insanity. Fortunately, though he finally came to his senses and was restored to his position of power. Only this time, he no longer trusted only in his own achievements and abilities. Now, he knew that there was a higher authority than his.

When the king was absorbed with his own power, he was oppressive and unconcerned with the poor (see verse 27). But, after his traumatic experience, he was far more compassionate and gracious. Having realised that his power and wealth could not keep him safe or control his world, he became more open to the needs of others. Pride always creates barriers between us and others, where humility always connects us. This is why we need faith – to remind us that we are not the masters of our own lives, and to open us to the relationships – with God and others – that lead us to life.

How can you respond to God and others with faith and compassion today?

Practice for Today: The Gospel always calls us to respond to its message. When we worship, we are opening ourselves to this Gospel, and offering a response in devotion to God and in commitment to follow God's ways. This response can be carried into our daily routines to keep us connected with God and with those around us. Today, allow your response to God to be one of humility and devotion that removes the negative impact of pride from your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have humbled yourself to connect with me, O God, so I humble myself to connect with you and those around me.

Friday 13 November 2015

Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

Reflection: When we read about the Gospel that the apostles preached, we discover strange paradoxes. In this short section from Colossians we encounter at least three amazing truths about our faith: The fullness of God has come to us in a human person (verse 9); We are made alive by being buried (in baptism – verse 12); And Jesus was victorious over evil by dying (verse 15). These all sound like contradictions, but they are important truths on which to build our lives. If we want authentic, abundant life, we must look to Christ, we must die to our old life and be raised into a new, Christlike one, and we must learn from Jesus to conquer evil through service and sacrifice – not power games.

All of this demonstrates how different the Gospel is from human wisdom. From a human perspective, death is the opposite of life, and we conquer our enemies by having bigger guns and more money, not by allowing ourselves to die. Yet, it is exactly this human perspective that is bringing such suffering and brokenness into our world. Perhaps it's time for us to take the contradictory life of Jesus more seriously, and embrace the sacrifice and service that promises life.

What sacrifices and service can you embrace in the name of Jesus today?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways that we can make a positive difference in the world is to allow our lives to proclaim the strange and contradictory message of the Gospel. When we find life by dying and when we embrace service and sacrifice instead of power games, others see Christ's life in us. Try to make your life a proclamation of these truths today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May my life proclaim your upside down Gospel today, O Christ.

Saturday 14 November 2015

Reading: Psalm 16

Reflection: Today's reading is a Psalm of hope and comfort. In it, God is portrayed as a refuge and God's people are seen as heroes and heroines – companions who are safe and who protect those around them. This, of course, applies to all of us. God's ways are an

inheritance that brings life and joy, and God's instruction keeps us firm and secure. These are encouraging words as we face the uncertainty of our world.

Sometimes God's ways seem naïve and silly in the face of the struggles in our world. Human wisdom tells us that, in order to find life and be safe in this world, we need to accumulate wealth and gain as much influence and power as we can. Only then, we think, can we control our world enough to feel secure. But, this strategy is doomed to fail because we can never have enough power or money to control every possible circumstance. Instead, we need to learn to trust in something far bigger and more secure – the ways of God. God never promises a life free of struggle and suffering. But, God does promise that, if we embrace the life-giving ways of God, we will have the resources we need to make it through every dark valley.

How can you trust in God's ways a little more today?

Practice for Today: One of the central practices in the way of Jesus is community – gathering together and sharing life. It is only in community that we really find security, because when we share our lives, we can care for, protect and support one another. This is why the Psalmist says that God's people are his heroes and heroines. Make today a day of sharing life with others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Your people, O God, are my heroes and heroines and I choose to share my life with them.

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