

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
27 December 2015 – 02 January 2016

Thought for the Week:

This week we have been celebrating the incarnation – God becoming human. It's one thing to proclaim that God has been embodied in human flesh, but it's a completely different thing to understand what that means for us today. If the incarnation is nothing more than an interesting quirk of history, it really makes no difference to our lives. But, of course the incarnation is far more than that. If we can believe the radical idea that, in the man Jesus, God was present and active in our human world, then that says an awful lot about God and about us. It tells us things about who God is and what we can expect from God, and it tells us things about who we are as human beings, and what we can expect of ourselves.

This week you may have heard about the boy Samuel who was dedicated to God and who lived in the Tabernacle with the old priest Eli. You may also have heard about when Jesus was forgotten in the Temple when he was twelve years old. If you put these two stories next to each other, you can't help but notice some parallels. Both Jesus and Samuel were dedicated to God from their birth. Both boys were very comfortable in the worship centres of their time. Both grew wise and strong and gained favour with people. And both came to influence God's people greatly. While there is one significant difference between the two – the Gospels proclaim Jesus as God in human flesh – there is a clear message in this resonance between the two boys: Jesus was not really different in his humanity, his experience of life, his need to grow and learn, from the rest of us. His divinity did not make him somehow "supernatural". When the creeds proclaim that Jesus was "fully human" they mean it.

It is important that we understand the humanity of Jesus, but also learn what his humanity says about his divinity. This is the tough challenge of this week.

Sunday 27 December 2015

Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Reflection: It's tempting to make more of this scene than the passage suggests. Notice that Jesus is not portrayed as "teaching" the religious leaders. Rather he listens and asks questions (verse 46). People are amazed at Jesus' answers and his understanding, but that is always the case when someone so young demonstrates insight and wisdom beyond their years. As Jesus spoke with the teachers in the Temple, this was not a case of God speaking and teaching the human leaders. Rather, it was a case of a boy with a passion for God and a keen mind seeking to learn as much as possible from those who were respected teachers. Later Jesus would challenge the Temple's leaders in many ways, but first he had to grasp the law and understand it deeply in order to fulfil it as he was called to do. Although this child was, in some way we may never fully understand, God, he was also very human – just a child who wanted to learn. And as he grew he remained obedient to his parents until the time came for his ministry to begin.

When we make the mistake of overemphasising Jesus' divinity, we run the risk of believing that he wasn't really human – at least not like us. But, if Jesus wasn't human, then nothing of his life has any real value for us. For our humanity to be transformed through Christ's teaching, life and death, Jesus must have been fully and completely human – just as we are. And that means that in Jesus we see what human beings can become, if we will only embrace the way of love as he did.

How can you allow Jesus to teach you how to be human today?

Practice for Today: The model that Jesus offers us here is invaluable. Although he had come to fulfil the law, to challenge women and men to become all that God had created them to be, Jesus did not begin by preaching. He started with listening and asking questions. This is always the way to growth and insight. Today, make listening and asking questions – of the Bible and of other people – a focus of your day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: What do you require of me today, O God?

Monday 28 December 2015

Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

Reflection: Today's reading offers one of the most beautiful and hopeful visions in the whole Bible. It reveals what the incarnation was all about – what the entire life, message, and mission of Jesus was for. In this vision from John's Revelation, a new heaven and earth are seen, and God's dwelling is seen to descend to the earth. This is a picture of heaven and earth finally becoming truly and visibly one. In this new unified reality God's presence is always known and recognised, suffering is always healed, and all things are constantly made new. It's a vision of love, connection, peace, and justice. Whenever we think about the coming of Jesus into our world, we need to remember this vision from Revelation because this is what Jesus came to accomplish.

But it is not just the work of Jesus to bring this vision into being. Jesus calls us to participate in creating this new, unified universe. Whenever we practice awareness of God's presence, we are participating in this vision. Whenever we help to heal another person's suffering, we are participating in this vision. Whenever we help to renew something that has become broken or tired or lifeless, we are participating in this vision. What can you do to help bring this new world into being today?

Practice for Today: The simplest acts of service contribute to the healing of our world. A compassionate smile offered to someone who is struggling, a word of welcome to a stranger, an act of kindness for someone who does not deserve it – these make a huge difference in the world. When we make service like this a discipline, we become part of God's healing work in the world. Try it today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me, O God, what small acts of service I can perform to help heal my world.

Tuesday 29 December 2015

Reading: Psalm 147:12-20

Reflection: For the people of Israel God's commands were treasures to be valued and enjoyed. The law was not seen as restrictive or destructive. It was a gift that God had given to God's

chosen people as an instrument by which they could share God's blessing with the world. That's why in this Psalm, God's words, God's commands, are included as part of the blessing of God that God's people enjoyed. From the Psalmist's perspective, God had strengthened Israel. God had given them peace and prosperity. God had given them the seasons with their different joys and benefits. But, it was all shaped by God's word. Above all, God's word was the life that kept the world growing and creating, and God's word was a blessing that guided and protected God's people.

As we saw on Sunday, even as a boy Jesus loved God's commands, and he didn't ever do away with them. He simply enabled us to see the spirit, the intent of God's law, and not get caught up in the letter, which could often be used in ways that contradicted God's purpose. Throughout his entire life, Jesus proclaimed the way God's word is able to give life and wholeness to those who follow it.

Today, as you seek to follow this Jesus who loved God's ways, why not let your life proclaim the blessing of God's word?

Practice for Today: Our lives are always proclaiming something, whether we are aware of it or not. Whatever we really believe and value, that is what is reflected in our lives, and that is what gets communicated to others. Today, try to be aware of what your life says to those around you, and try to ensure that it proclaims the beauty of God's ways.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May the beauty of your ways be seen in my life, O God.

Wednesday 30 December 2015

Reading: 2 Chronicles 1:7-13

Reflection: The writer of Chronicles probably wrote shortly after the return of the Israelites from exile in Babylon. The challenge of that time was how to avoid the mistakes of the past that had resulted in the exile in the first place. For the Chronicler, the answer to that question lay in the restoration of Israel's worship. When the Israelites were faithful and followed God's wisdom, they had prospered. But, when they had allowed idolatry, injustice, and

foolishness to shape their lives, they had experienced destruction. So, the writer of Chronicles took his readers back to the time of Israel's greatest glory – the time of David and the early part of Solomon's reign.

Today we read of Solomon's request for wisdom, which so pleased God that he received not just the wisdom he asked for, but wealth, power, and prestige as well. However, as Solomon's story unfolded, his wisdom seemed to run out. He allowed himself to be led into idolatry by his many wives, and he shifted from his initial concern that he govern his people well to a self-centred, self-aggrandising pride. This is in stark contrast to Jesus, who, in bringing God's Reign into the world, chose humility, self-giving, and faithfulness to God from his birth all the way through to his death and resurrection.

The way we begin does not predict the way we will end, unless we work consistently to stay true to God's purposes and priorities. How can you renew your commitment to God's ways today?

Practice for Today: A commitment to Christ, and to the way of Jesus, is not a once-off decision. It needs to be a moment-by-moment experience, in which we choose, in every situation and interaction, to embrace the wisdom, grace, love, and justice of God. Today, in whatever circumstances you may find yourself, try to be mindful of choosing the Jesus way in every moment.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I ask for your wisdom, O God, and for the faithfulness to choose your wise ways in every moment of my life.

Thursday 31 December 2015

Reading: John 8:12-19

Reflection: Today we get a small glimpse into what Jesus' divinity tells us about God. In John's Gospel Jesus makes seven radical statements about himself. They are known as the "I am..." statements, because they all start with the words "I am". The way Jesus expressed these two words in the Greek makes a startling point. He used a strange form of speech that resonates with God's words to Moses in the Old Testament. When Moses asks for God's name, God's reply is "I am that I am". In the ancient Hebrew, which

had no vowels, God's name is expressed in four letters: YHWH (known as the tetragrammaton). We usually pronounce this name as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" in English. The way Jesus said, "I am" was intentionally designed to associate him with this name of God.

In today's reading Jesus claims that he is the light of the world. It is light that enables us to see. It is light that creates colour. Then, when Jesus is challenged by the religious leaders, he responds confidently, ending with the statement that they would know God if they knew him. The simple truth here is this: God is like Jesus. As light helps us to see what is hidden in darkness, so Jesus helps us to see the mystery of God's nature. If we ever hold on to a picture of God that doesn't look like Jesus, we've missed the mark. God is to be understood through the character and actions of Jesus.

How can you allow Jesus to lead you into a deeper understanding of God today?

Practice for Today: When we take time to really "see" Jesus, to focus on who he was and what he did, we are learning more about God. One of the best ways to practice this focussed attention is through praise. As we praise Jesus, we learn to see and understand him better – and through him, God. Try it today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you Jesus, Light of the world, for the way you reveal God to me.

New Year's Day Friday 01 January 2016

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Reflection: This week, as we have explored what the incarnation of God in Jesus means for us, we have encountered the very ordinary humanity of Jesus, and we have recognised how Jesus reveals God to us. Today at the start of a New Year, we are confronted with another startling truth. It is not only Jesus who incarnates God. Jesus is unique in his relationship with the Father, and in the way God was incarnated in him, but there is a sense in which we are all "little incarnations" of God.

Genesis tells us that we all have God's breath (Spirit) within us and that we are all created in God's image. Now Jesus, in this very challenging parable, teaches that when we serve others, we are

actually serving him. Mysteriously, Jesus is embodied in the poor and weak, the vulnerable and marginalised. There is a strong call in the scriptures to recognise that the incarnation is not just about one miraculous event long ago in history. The incarnation is about how we see and live in the world. When we live with an "incarnational" worldview, we see God everywhere and in everyone, and we treat people and our planet as though we were serving God directly. When we place God in some far off heaven, and we make the incarnation an event that is separate from us, we can far more easily write others off, and ignore the consequences of how we treat them and our world.

As you begin a New Year today, how can you commit to looking for Jesus in the faces of others throughout the year?

Practice for Today: The challenging message of today's parable is that when we serve others, we encounter Jesus in them. Service is a way to encounter and connect with God. Today, at every opportunity, serve God by serving those around you – and let today set the course for how you treat others throughout this year.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Give me the strength and grace to serve you, Jesus, by serving others.

Saturday 02 January 2016

Reading: Proverbs 1:1-7

Reflection: The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings and parables that have been found helpful for millennia. Many of our common adages originate in this book. At the start of a New Year it's always good to reflect on the values and purposes by which we will choose to live in the months to come. This introduction to Proverbs indicates that the book is designed for exactly this kind of decision-making. Its purpose is to teach wisdom and discipline – the two skills that are so desperately needed if we are to navigate the world in healthy and life-giving ways. The final declaration of this short section of the book is that such wisdom is found in the fear of God. This is not fear in the sense of terror or anxiety. The original intention of this word is reverence or awe. In other words, as we open ourselves to encounter God and respond in awe and reverence, that's when we are learning wisdom.

So, how are we to encounter God in this way? Jesus boldly proclaimed that when we see him, we are seeing God. So, as we open our lives to Christ, as we allow Jesus to reveal God to us, and as we follow the ways and teachings of Jesus, we grow wise and disciplined, and our lives become whole and life giving.

How can you allow Jesus to lead you deeper into God's wisdom today?

Practice for Today: Whenever we gather for worship, we invoke God's Spirit to strengthen and teach us. Whenever we need wisdom, we can also invoke God's Spirit to strengthen and teach us. As we invite God's Spirit to work within us, the Spirit reminds us of Jesus' life and teaching and inspires us to follow Jesus more closely. Today, whenever you need wisdom, call on God's Spirit to help.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, teach me and strengthen me as I seek to follow Jesus.

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