

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
13 - 19 March 2016

Thought for the Week:

The Lenten season is often viewed as a sombre time. Few people celebrate or enjoy repentance, and the word "discipline" is seldom associated with celebration. Yet, this week, as we enter the final stretch of Lent before the Holy Week journey through Jesus' suffering, the Lectionary calls us to celebrate. The Gospel reading from John tells of Mary's extravagant display of devotion to Jesus as she anointed his feet with expensive perfume and dried them with her hair. The Old Testament reading from Isaiah, and the Psalm which is set for this week, call God's people to celebrate God's salvation. It may feel strange to speak of celebration in Lent, but all the heart-searching, discipline, and repentance is about becoming whole, living up to our best selves, and enjoying the abundant life that comes from the loving, sacrificial way of Jesus. Mary's offering is a challenging example of such celebratory devotion.

It can be easy, when faced with the suffering and evil of our world, to lose the capacity to celebrate. It can be easy to become cynical, pessimistic, and despairing as we wait for God's justice to fill the world. Yet, if we allow ourselves to lose hope and joy, we also lose our capacity to experience God's life, and to contribute to bringing healing and justice into our small corner. When we live from fear, we become self-protective hoarders who try to hold on to what we have in case things go wrong. Yet, in her love for Jesus and her trust of his way, Mary easily let go of what little wealth she had in order to give herself to the Reign of God that Jesus proclaimed. Following Jesus is not about becoming overly serious and sombre, and it's not about clinging to survival. Rather, the way of Jesus is the way of extravagant sharing, joyful celebration, and trusting love. This is the call of our meditations this week.

Sunday 13 March 2016

Reading: John 12:1-8

Reflection: It was common in Jesus' time for people to put their life-savings into articles of great value. There were no banks, and so any excess wealth was invested in objects that retained their value and that could be sold when money was needed. The jar of perfume that Mary broke to anoint Jesus' feet was probably just such a savings plan – Judas remarked that it was worth a year's wages! Yet, in her devotion to Jesus, and her commitment to his way, Mary happily gave up her wealth to celebrate the one who had brought life to her and her family – especially her once-dead brother Lazarus.

In contrast to Mary's act of celebration and devotion, John describes Judas' reaction. He was unimpressed and felt that this was an inappropriate waste. The Gospel writer indicates that this was not because he was particularly concerned for the poor, but that he was a thief and would have preferred to have "diverted" some of this money into his own pockets. Nevertheless, Judas represents what happens when we allow our faith to become too ascetic, too poor in joy and celebration, and too weighed down by the cares of the world, or of our circumstances.

Jesus' final comment draws attention to the extravagant gift of love that he would soon be giving to the world – his own life. The message here is clear. A life lived in love will always be extravagant in the way it gives itself for others.

How can you be extravagant in love and celebration today?

Practice for Today: When we know that everything we enjoy is a gift, we cannot help but respond in thanksgiving and celebration. And the best way to express this joy is through sharing the blessing. Today, try to be as generous as you can in sharing your blessings through the discipline of giving.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have blessed me, O God, so I give thanks through blessing others.

Monday 14 March 2016

Reading: Hebrews 10:19-25

Reflection: As we noted yesterday, Mary's extravagant gift served to draw attention to Jesus' even more extravagant gift of himself. Today, the writer to the Hebrews celebrates the gift of Jesus and the

new life that it brings to us. Because of Jesus we can boldly enter heaven's Holy of Holies. This is a beautiful way of saying that God has opened the door to intimate communion with God's Self. Also, because of Jesus, we can enjoy God's presence without guilt, because Jesus has opened the way to forgiveness and to a new way of living that is free from what harms and stains us. It is an immense and deeply gracious gift of God's Self that we have received in Christ, and, if we can begin to grasp its significance, we can only respond in celebration.

But, there are a few other ways that the writer invites us to respond as well. We can hold on to our hope. We can motivate one another to acts of love and to good works. We can be faithful and committed to meeting together as followers of Christ to encourage one another and worship together. All of these responses are small but important ways to honour the Christ who has given so much for us. And, as we live in this way, we bring God's life and grace to others who are then invited to join the celebration!

What act of love or good work can you do today in response to Jesus' gift to you?

Practice for Today: The call to serve, which echoes throughout the ministry of Jesus, does not only apply to big, important works. Even the smallest act done in love, helps to make the life of others more meaningful and whole. Today, commit to performing one or two acts of love for someone close to you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I thank you for giving yourself for me, Jesus, and I respond by sharing your love with others.

Tuesday 15 March 2016

Reading: Psalm 20

Reflection: Today's Psalm may have been a prayer for a king about to do battle. The people pray for their king because they know that their destiny is wrapped up in the king's. But they also know that it is God who has the final say, and so they turn to God. There is both a request for help in this prayer and a declaration of confidence in God's response. For a king who is facing a difficult conflict, such

support and encouragement from his people would be a very powerful gift.

Although the Psalm does not directly connect with Jesus' sacrifice, there is a sense in which Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet resonates with the sentiment of this poem. Mary seeks to bless Jesus who is very aware of his pending sacrifice. The one who has proclaimed the Reign of God is about to "do battle" with evil by absorbing its worst attack in his own body and responding with grace and forgiveness. But, to do so, he will need God's strength, and he will need to be rescued by God. Mary's act of love and devotion celebrates who Jesus is and what he has come to do. She probably had little understanding of what was about to transpire, but she must have sensed his distress and decided to do what she could to support and encourage him. Such acts of love, solidarity and celebration have immense power to sustain us when we face tough times.

Who needs you to support and celebrate them today as they face a difficult time?

Practice for Today: In worship we bring our praise to God. In our daily living, we can also speak words of praise, but to those around us. Such affirmations are gifts of encouragement and celebration that inspire and strengthen those to whom they are given. Today, use every opportunity to affirm those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In your name, Jesus, I celebrate my companions in the journey.

Wednesday 16 March 2016

Reading: Luke 18:31-34

Reflection: The Gospels often speak about the way Jesus predicted his death, and they always indicate that the disciples failed to understand what he meant. This is not surprising. It is unusual to hear someone speak with such certainty about his or her own death, and then still commit to going to the place where the death is going to happen. Usually, when there is even the slightest hint of a threat to our lives, we run off in the opposite direction as quickly as we can. But, Jesus did not shy away from what was coming. Nor, did he

refuse to go to the city where he knew he would be tortured and die. For Jesus there were more important concerns than saving his life. There was the incomparable task of confronting the evil empires of this world, and conquering them with love. There was the need to demonstrate the power of his message of peace and justice by living it to the very end. And there was the call to embrace death in order to reach the resurrection beyond it.

In our own lives we face the choice daily to either focus primarily on protecting ourselves or to give ourselves for the sake of love. When others seek intimacy with us, we can resist the vulnerability, or we can embrace it. When others challenge or oppose us, we can fight or run away, or we can absorb their attacks and respond in forgiveness and love. If we are truly to follow Jesus, we will have to learn to let go of our self-protectiveness and embrace the pain of loving.

How can you lower your defences a little today?

Practice for Today: It is common, especially when we meet those who are unknown or very different from us, to be cautious and self-protective. It is also common to respond to aggression with aggression when we are hurt. Today, try, in both of these situations, to lower your defences a little, and allow love to guide you into a different response.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me, Jesus, to love freely and recklessly.

Thursday 17 March 2016

Reading: Isaiah 53:10-12

Reflection: The prophecy of Isaiah has many songs that focus on the "Servant of the Lord". Today's reading comes from the most famous one – Isaiah 53. In this one we read of the servant who suffers for the sake of others, and who responds with silence, grace and forgiveness. In these last few verses of the chapter, we read about the aftermath of the suffering that this servant undergoes. Ultimately his life is rescued and he enjoys a long life. And when he sees what his suffering has accomplished, he is satisfied. All the

pain is worth it in the end, because of the life that is brought to so many people as a result.

We don't know whom Isaiah was thinking of when he wrote these words, but throughout the ages commentators have noted the resonance with the sacrifice of Jesus. Today's reading sounds a little like Paul's song about Jesus in Philippians 2 where, because he humbled himself and was obedient to death, Jesus was given the name above every name. The pain of the cross was unbearable, but in the end, what Jesus accomplished brought him great honour and glory and brought life to millions. I like to think that Jesus feels it was all worth it!

As we prepare for Holy Week, which starts this Sunday, perhaps you can reflect on your own response to Jesus' sacrifice. How can you follow his example and embrace struggle in order to bring life and joy to others?

Practice for Today: The task of prayer is not to pass responsibility for the needs of others on to God so that we don't have to experience the pain of serving and helping them. Rather, prayer is meant to break our hearts for the things that break God's heart, and call us to become more engaged in bringing life and goodness to those around us. Today, when you pray, ask God how God wants you to respond to the needs you address.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Use me, O God, to bring life to my friends and neighbours.

Friday 18 March 2016

Reading: Hebrews 2:1-9

Reflection: The book of Hebrews speaks about angels quite a bit, especially in the beginning chapters. It was believed that the Law of Moses was given through angels. Now, in this passage, the writer refers to the message of Christ as even more important than the law, since Jesus is worshipped by angels. For this reason, it is important that those who have received Christ's message should remain faithful. In addition, Jesus, who became "a little lower than angels", is now "crowned with glory" because he willingly suffered and died for everyone.

It seems that the writer was addressing Christians who were growing tired and were falling away from the faith. In reminding them of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, the writer encourages them to stay strong and to endure their struggles with faithfulness. This is an important message for us today, especially as we prepare for the Holy Week meditation on the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

There are still many struggles and attractions that can draw us away from faith. Following Jesus can be hard, and the values he teaches can be difficult to embrace. As we face a world that lives so differently, we may be tempted to abandon this alternative way of being. But, when we take the time to remember all that Jesus is and does in us and in our world, we can find strength to continue, and to keep growing in our faith.

What makes it hard for you to follow Jesus today? How can you stay faithful in the face of this challenge?

Practice for Today: Sometimes love means staying committed and faithful even when we don't feel like it. Having feelings of doubt and uncertainty are not a problem if we do not allow them to drive us. In times when our faith feels weak, it can be helpful just to make a positive commitment to stay on the path in spite of our doubts. Today, whenever you are tempted to stray from the values of Jesus, make a conscious choice to affirm your commitment to his way.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Even when I don't feel faithful and strong, I choose to follow you, Jesus.

Saturday 19 March 2016

Reading: Isaiah 54:9-10

Reflection: The people of Israel experienced their exile as a punishment from God. As the time of their captivity came to an end, they began to think about what their life would be like, back in their homeland. But, there must also have been a concern in the back of their minds about what would happen if they were unable to stay faithful – even as their ancestors had been unable. In response, the prophet offers the people a word of reassurance. Nothing can separate the people from God's love. Nothing can break God's

covenant with them. Never will God's anger be experienced as it was in the past.

Note, that this does not mean that the people won't experience trouble again – mountains moving and hills disappearing speaks of disastrous and traumatic events that may indeed still happen. Yet, God's promise is that, no matter what may come, God will remain merciful, loving and present to God's people. This must have been a massive shift in understanding for these people. It was a new idea that they could fail, that trouble could come, and that God could still love them and remain committed to them. No longer could they see even their sin as more powerful than God's love.

In spite of this, it is still tempting for us to view God as judgemental and destructive toward those who fail and sin. The guilt and fear this creates does not help us, but often drives us away from God. As we turn to the time of remembering Jesus' death, let's hold on the truth, sung by Michael Card, that God would rather die than live without us.

Practice for Today: When we face difficult times and we are tempted to doubt God's love, it is important to resist becoming negative and cynical. One of the best ways to counteract these destructive influences is to make thanksgiving a habit. Today, make a special effort to remember how God's love has touched your life and spend the day giving thanks.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your love that never fails, O God, I thank you.

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