

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
Holy Week 20 – 26 March 2016

Thought for the Week:

This week we journey through Holy Week – the time when we meditate on Jesus' final days before his death. In these last moments, Jesus faced strong opposition from the religious leaders as he offered some of his most challenging teachings. But, he also demonstrated to his disciples the grace and love that characterised his ministry. One central theme that runs through the entire week is the meaning of Christ's death. This is a subject that has been the source of much debate through the centuries, and there are a number of different ways to understand the sacrifice of Jesus. Sometimes it's best to simply allow the Scriptures to speak without trying to analyse too much, especially during this important season.

As you journey through Holy Week, try to make some extra time to reflect on the life, death and message of Jesus. Meditate on the cost he was willing to pay for the sake of God's Reign, and on his commitment to love and service above all. Notice how his values challenge and undermine those of human systems of power, wealth, and instant gratification, and investigate the extent to which your own life follows the values of Jesus. If your church is offering services of worship through this week, you might want to make an extra effort to attend in order to allow this significant season to touch your life more deeply.

May this Holy Week bring you closer to Christ, and draw you deeper into the revolutionary reality we call the Reign of God.

Palm Sunday 20 March 2016

Reading: Luke 19:28-40

Reflection: The way Jesus entered Jerusalem demonstrated how very different Jesus' values are from those of our world. Notice, firstly, that the crowd was made up of his followers. This does not seem to have been a massive crowd drawn from the people of the

region and from Jerusalem. It was really only those who were already committed to the way of Jesus. Secondly, the colt on which Jesus rode had never been ridden before. This is a significant feature of this story, because it speaks to Jesus' willingness to lay aside his own dignity in service of God's Reign. Donkeys are known as stubborn animals that can be difficult to control. How much more difficult, then, would it have been to control a colt that had never experienced a rider before! This was not the procession of a "conquering hero". It was a small, rather comical gathering of a ragtag bunch of people following a rather foolish-looking preacher.

The final feature of Luke's account is that there were some Pharisees among the crowd – obviously some of the religious leaders were drawn to Jesus and his message. But, they were concerned about how this procession may have been interpreted by the powerful Roman oppressors, and so they asked Jesus to silence the crowd. In response, Jesus declared that if the people were quiet, the stones would cry out. The Reign of God does not just include people, but all of creation. It is an entirely new order that embraces the whole universe, down to the smallest stone on the path!

How does this story challenge and deepen your understanding of God's Reign?

Practice for Today: The most appropriate response to today's reading is praise. But, it's important that we think carefully about the content of our praises. Today, praise Jesus for the subversive, alternative nature of his message and mission.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For the subversive Reign of God which you proclaimed and demonstrated, Jesus, I praise you.

Monday 21 March 2016

Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Reflection: In the priestly understanding of Christ's work, offered in the book of Hebrews, the role of blood sacrifice as a cleansing act is highlighted. Traditionally, this is seen as a process of giving a life in order to save a life. So, in the Israelite sacrificial system, animals were often sacrificed in order to secure the forgiveness and cleansing of their owners. This was a significantly more

compassionate system than the child sacrifice that was so common in the nations around Israel at the time that the sacrificial system was established. It is also an incredible reflection on Christ's love that he should willingly give himself as a sacrifice for others.

We must be careful not to view Christ's sacrifice as God performing the kind of child sacrifice that God condemns in God's people. It may be more helpful to recognise that self-preservation is one of the primary flaws in human nature that leads us to violence, greed, oppression, and exploitation of one another. The obvious antidote to self-preservation is self-sacrifice. Jesus demonstrated the life-giving power of self-sacrifice through his death – his refusal to abandon love in the name of self-preservation. Now, in doing this he has rejected the need to punish us for our sinfulness and has freed us from our guilt. In addition, he has shown us the way to the best life – the way of self-sacrifice in the name of love. In this way, Jesus' death is a liberating, healing, and transforming reality for us – and his blood is the symbol of this amazing act of love and grace.

In what ways can you follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice today?

Practice for Today: Until we are willing to acknowledge our self-preservation and its destructiveness, we never really embrace the gift that Jesus' death is to us. But, when we are willing to confess our sin and embrace the sacrificial way of Jesus, everything changes – we discover new life, and we become those who bring life to others as we commit to love above all.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When my self-preservation leads me away from love, Jesus, forgive me and change me.

Tuesday 22 March 2016

Reading: Isaiah 49:1-7

Reflection: The prophet Isaiah speaks on a number of occasions of the "Servant of the Lord". This messianic figure is commissioned by God to bring God's message, God's glory and God's Reign to God's people. The servant is also the one who suffers on behalf of God's people. In the Gospels these servant songs are applied to Jesus, and he is seen as the fulfilment of their message.

In today's song, we see the confidence of the servant in God's call. This is important because the work that the servant does appears to be fruitless at first. But, it is this trust in God's call that enables the servant to trust God for the results as well. Then, when God responds, God reveals that the servant's work is far greater than even he had realised. It is not just Israel, but all nations who will find salvation through the servant.

The death of Jesus appears, at first glance, like the greatest failure. How can a dead man overthrow empires and transform the world? How can God's Reign be established when its messenger is silenced by the powers of this world? Yet, the miracle of Holy Week is that it is in dying that Jesus proclaimed God's Reign most clearly and powerfully. It is in refusing to bow to the expediency, self-protection, and violence of the world that Jesus showed how powerful love, self-sacrifice, and service can be. And in proclaiming this new way of being so powerfully, Jesus has captured and changed our hearts.

In what ways is your life being transformed by the sacrificial way of Jesus? And where, in your life, is God turning failure into glory?

Practice for Today: Sometimes we may feel unsure of our faith. We may doubt that we are able to make any contribution to the world. In times like this, committing to God's call and God's ways can sustain and strengthen us. It's not that we feel faithful or strong, but that we choose to continue in Jesus' way in spite of our doubts. Today, whenever you feel uncertain, take a moment to renew your commitment.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Even when I'm unsure, O God, I choose to trust your call and your way.

Wednesday 23 March 2016

Reading: John 13:21-32

Reflection: The scene in the Upper Room, as told in John's Gospel, is a poignant and tragic one. We do not know for sure how Jesus knew, but he was aware that Judas had planned to betray him. There was deep sadness in Jesus over this, but no condemnation. Apart from Peter and John, not even the disciples were told about

Judas' betrayal. Yet a little of the nervousness and fear that would later manifest in the Garden of Gethsemane is seen here in the way Jesus urged Judas to do things quickly.

Once Judas had left the room, Jesus proclaimed that the time for him to enter his glory had come. Once again the Gospel states firmly that God's glory is most clearly revealed in the cross. God's glory is simply the manifestation of God's nature, God's presence and God's purpose. This means that if we want to know what God is like, the best place to look is to the cross. It is in this act of selfless sacrifice that Jesus revealed God's true nature – as gracious, not condemning, and as self-giving, not violent.

There are two ways we could respond to this story. Firstly, we are challenged to recognise the ways in which we betray Jesus – which is to seek to manipulate him to our own agendas and personal empires. And secondly, we are invited to recognise the glory of God revealed in Jesus, and to respond to this God with thanksgiving, commitment and self-giving. How can you respond to the glory of God in Christ today?

Practice for Today: When we allow Jesus to show us God's glory, we cannot help but respond in thanksgiving for who God is. It's easy to think of God as judgemental, or as a violent, conquering Emperor. But, in Jesus we see a different picture, and we can recognise the extent of God's grace and love. Today, remember this and give thanks.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your glory and grace, revealed in Jesus, O God, I give you thanks.

Maundy Thursday 24 March 2016

Reading: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Reflection: Today is Maundy Thursday, the day when we remember the Last Supper and the final moments of Jesus' ministry before he was arrested and crucified. In John's Gospel there is little of the actual supper – there is no "Do this in remembrance of me" (John substitutes the "Bread of Life" discourse in chapter 6 for this). Rather, for John's Gospel, the focus is on the act of washing feet. In a world where people walked long distances on dusty roads in

sandals, washing feet was the job of the lowest slaves. For Jesus to take on this role was a shocking thing for the disciples, in spite of all he had taught them over the years. This is why Peter resisted at first, and then, when Jesus explained that he needed to be washed to belong to Jesus, he went to the opposite extreme asking for his whole self to be washed. This sadly comical scene reveals how much Peter still had to learn. But, before we point fingers at the big fisherman, we must acknowledge that our own struggles to reject power games, status games, and the selfish needs of our own pride show that we, too, have a lot to learn.

The simple command of Jesus – given in word and action in this moment – is that we love one another as Jesus has loved us. Remember, Judas was included in those whose feet were washed, even though Jesus knew what he was about to do! This call to love and service could not be much clearer, yet we still reject, exclude, judge, and attack one another. As Richard Rohr notes, it's amazing that foot washing never became a sacrament, in spite of the fact that Jesus commanded it. Perhaps we're still struggling to come to terms with the implications of this radical act!

How can you embrace the love of Christ for those around you and learn to "wash their feet"?

Practice for Today: When we take the time to really see and pray for others from a position of compassion and service, our prayers teach us to love them and "wash their feet". When we do this, judgement and exclusion become impossible. Can you pray in this way today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I look at those around me, Jesus, teach me to love them and serve them as you do.

Good Friday 25 March 2016

Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Reflection: Today, as we remember Jesus' suffering on the cross, the Book of Hebrews offers us some insight into why Jesus was so willing to sacrifice himself in this way. The point of reference for this teaching is the sacrificial system, which would have been very familiar to the Jewish audience to whom these words were

addressed. Yet, here, Jesus is seen as both priest and sacrifice. As priest he "enters heaven" – the throne room of God – in the same way the Israelite priests would enter the Holy of Holies to bring the blood of their sacrifices. As sacrifice, Jesus pours out his own blood as an offering on behalf of his people, securing God's grace and mercy. But, as a human being, Jesus lived and died as one who was immersed in prayer and in union with God, and one who was obedient to the end.

The big question that is raised by all this is why, if God is a God of love, there needed to be a death before forgiveness could be secured. Surely if God is God, God is powerful enough and merciful enough to find another, less bloodthirsty way to bring mercy to people? If we remember that the Scriptures reflect the spiritual journey of the writers and their times, then we begin to realise that it was not God who needed the sacrifice, but the people. In their history they had moved from child sacrifice to animal sacrifice and now, because of Jesus, they were able to see that no sacrifice is necessary for God. Still, the death of Jesus was inevitable because whenever love confronts hatred and injustice, the forces of evil try to extinguish love. But, as we know, they were not successful!

How can you follow Jesus' example of love and self-giving for the sake of others today?

Practice for Today: If the death of Jesus tells us anything, it is that God was willing to give everything out of love for us. God's welcome and grace are inexhaustible! And the best way for us to receive this love is to share it with others. Today, seek to welcome and offer grace to others in Christ's name.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you gave yourself in order to welcome me, Jesus, so I give myself for others in your name.

Holy Saturday 26 March 2016

Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

Reflection: Today is an in-between time. Yesterday we remembered the crucifixion of Jesus, but we have not yet reached the celebration of resurrection. Today all we have to do is observe – like the two Marys – the dead body of Jesus as it lies in the tomb. It

was a very generous gesture for Joseph of Arimathea to offer his own tomb for Jesus' burial, but, since he had become a follower of Jesus, it was probably a small sacrifice for him to make. It is a mark of the arrogance of these religious leaders, though, that they would presume to seal and set guards over a tomb that was owned by a private citizen with no request for permission from the owner.

There are always those who would prefer that resurrection does not happen. In the religious leaders' defence, they were concerned that Jesus would cause a revolution and bring the wrath of Rome down on the people. If the disciples, whom they had no reason to trust, decided to steal the body and claim a resurrection, then killing Jesus would backfire on them, and the revolution would happen anyway – or so they thought. They clearly had not been listening to the non-violent message of Jesus. As a writer, though, Matthew wanted to assure the readers of his Gospel that no such theft had happened – the religious leaders had made sure of that. So, the resurrection, Matthew proclaims, is a reality!

It is tempting in times of pain, suffering and change to see death as the end, and to try and seal the past away. But, sometimes there needs to be a death before life can resurrect. And when it does, our best efforts to shut it away will fail. How can you wait today with hope and expectation for resurrection in your life?

Practice for Today: The practice of waiting, watching and listening is not very popular in our world today, but it is a crucial one if we are to experience God's life and direction. Today, instead of rushing to find solutions, or to close doors on the past, slow down and take some time to watch and wait while you listen for God's next word of guidance.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Although things may seem stagnant or dead, O God, I watch and wait for your resurrection.

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