

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

27 March – 02 April 2016

Thought for the Week:

Christ is Risen! Once again we proclaim the awesome mystery of our faith! This year, we get to explore the resurrection event through the eyes of the writer of Luke's Gospel. What is amazing about this account, is that the first witnesses are women (who could not testify in a law court) and two insignificant disciples (one of whom is not even named). Only after this, does Jesus appear to his inner circle! All Peter gets at first, is the enigmatic evidence of an empty tomb. Once again, as with most of Luke's Gospel, Jesus is making the last first and the first last – and this is an important feature of this resurrection account.

When we keep the resurrection in the past – making it only a historical event, and arguing about the facts and details – we keep its transforming power at bay. It's easy to say "Jesus is risen" without it having any impact on our lives, even if we are wholly convinced of this truth. But, when we allow our hearts to be captivated by resurrection life – the all-embracing, empowering, inclusive, transforming life that transcends all evil and unjust forces that divide and oppress humanity – then we don't only say "Jesus is risen", we live it!

In the next fifty days of the Easter season we will be exploring what it means to live now as people of the resurrection – not just people who declare that Jesus was risen in the past.

Easter Sunday 27 March 2016

Reading: Luke 24:1-12

Reflection: I wonder whether Peter, James, and John were upset that they were so late in witnessing the resurrection. Luke tells us that when the women shared the news, they considered it to be nonsense and wouldn't believe it. When Peter ran to check their story, all he saw was the empty tomb, and he came away wondering what had happened. Then, when the two disciples from the

Emmaus road returned the three main apostles must have started wondering why they had been left out. But, this way of appearing to people is characteristic of Jesus, and aligns with the way he had lived throughout his ministry. It was always the marginalised, unimportant, and outcast that Jesus welcomed and included. The clear statement here is that there is nothing that we can do or achieve in order to receive Jesus' resurrection life. Jesus appears at his initiative to whomever he chooses, and his life is available to all.

It's a pity, then, that so many of us who claim to believe in Jesus' resurrection believe that God's life is limited to those who jump through certain doctrinal or behavioural hoops. It's a pity that we so often convince ourselves that the resurrection can only happen according to our beliefs or expectations, and only to those with whom we agree. In so many ways, we have responded as Peter and the others did – questioning and doubting those who joyously proclaim God's resurrection life. Imagine how many outbreaks of resurrection we may have missed this way!

Today, try to let go of your expectations and assumptions and look for signs of resurrection in unexpected places and people.

Practice for Today: It takes humility and an open heart to recognise God's life when it appears in surprising ways. But, without this openness, we never really experience the fullness of resurrection, and we become incapable of sharing God's life with others. Today, allow the practice of praise to humble you and open your heart to God's limitless life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your resurrection which cannot be contained even by death, Jesus, I give you praise.

Monday 28 March 2016

Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

Reflection: Sometimes it seems like the writers of the New Testament epistles had not yet completely released their legalism. Today's reading is one which could give this impression. The Corinthian church had allowed destructive and harmful sexual behaviour to become acceptable among them, and the apostles were very unhappy about it – to the point where strong words of

judgement were spoken, and instructions were issued to remove the "wicked person" from the church. This hardly sounds like the gracious life of Jesus!

Except that it is a misunderstanding of grace, love, and life to believe that these qualities lead us into an "anything goes" way of being. In today's teaching, the apostle uses a metaphor that Jesus also used – bread and yeast – and explains that small destructive actions filter through our lives like yeast through dough, and shape us in destructive ways. But, because Christ has given his life to us, we no longer have to live like this. We can be liberated - like the Israelites at the Passover - and our lives can be like new, unleavened Passover bread – without the "yeast" of sinful and damaging ways. This means that the life of Christ leads us away from destructive ways that bring death to ourselves and others, and into creative, life-giving ways. When we are truly living as people of resurrection, we will automatically find ourselves seeking to bring life to others however we can.

How can you live as a resurrection person today, bringing life to those around you?

Practice for Today: Small acts of generosity and kindness go a long way to helping those around us share God's life. Today, no matter how you may feel, try to treat everyone you meet with kindness in Jesus' name.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As your life fills me, Jesus, so I seek to share that life with others.

Tuesday 29 March 2016

Reading: Revelation 12:1-12

Reflection: If you find yourself feeling a bit confused and dazed by today's reading, you won't be alone. Even though this passage is one of the most well known parts of the vision of the Revelation, it is also one of the least understood. In attempts to fit these images into current events, so many interpretations have been given that the message of John's vision has become completely obscured. It is fruitless to try and identify the woman too closely, or to connect the

dragon with any particular person. And none of this is necessary to hear what the vision is seeking to tell us.

At the start of the Book of Revelation we are told that it is the "revelation of Jesus." So, everything in the book is designed to reveal the truth about Christ and his mission. What becomes clear, when we remember this, is that a child who would rule the nations – Jesus – was liberated from the forces of evil and "snatched up to God". This is the resurrection story in another form. Though death tried to consume Jesus, and evil forces tried to destroy him, he was delivered and overcame them. Now, the Reign of Jesus is irrepressibly growing and transforming the nations. But, this does not mean that evil does not still seek to fight – and so the "war" continues both spiritually (in heaven) and physically (on earth).

This is not a war that is won through violence, but through love and sacrifice. That is why those who defeat evil do so through the "blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." And, as long we keep witnessing to Jesus and his sacrificial love in our own lives, the days of evil are numbered. This is our resurrection hope!

How can you embrace the victory of resurrection over evil in your own life today?

Practice for Today: It is so easy, when we see news headlines, to fall into cynicism, despair and violent responses – like calling for the death penalty, or seeking to protect ourselves with firearms and aggression against our enemies. But, this is to use the strategies of evil to overcome evil, and they inevitably turn us into the very thing we are trying to defeat. Today, seek to respond to evil with love and sacrifice, as Jesus did. And the first step is to pray earnestly for both victims and perpetrators of evil.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Whenever I encounter evil, Jesus, teach me to overcome it with love and sacrifice – as you did.

Wednesday 30 March 2016

Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Reflection: Psalm 118 was probably originally a celebration song for a victorious king returning from battle. This psalmist believed that God's faithful love was revealed through a military victory. We can

only see things this way when we think of God as “our” God who is on “our” side and against our enemies. But, Jesus made it clear that God is not a tribal God, and that the true victory is not when people win wars against each other, but when the evil that causes war and suffering is defeated through sacrifice and love. This is why some of the New Testament writers re-interpreted this Psalm with the resurrection in mind.

The reference to God's strong right arm is a reference to prowess in battle – a strong sword-carrying arm was crucial in the fight. The king in this Psalm recognised that it was God's strength that counts, not his own. So, even though he suffered and seemed defeated, he trusted in God's victory. For the New Testament writers, this all applied to Jesus. It was Jesus who was "punished" by God (vs.18) but lived. It was Jesus who was the stone that the builders rejected, but who became the cornerstone (vs.22), and it is Sunday – the day of resurrection – that is the day that God made and in which we are called to rejoice most passionately.

What battles are you or your loved ones fighting against evil today?
How can you embrace the victory of the resurrection as your own?

Practice for Today: Although it can be tough to celebrate in difficult times, there is power when we make the choice to remember the goodness that endures in spite of evil. No matter how much we may suffer, when we can continue to sing, dance and laugh, we will always find strength and joy to overcome the worst circumstances. Make today a day of celebration in the power of resurrection.

Breath-Prayer for Today: This, too, is the day you have made, O God, and I rejoice in it and the resurrection life it brings to me.

Thursday 31 March 2016

Reading: Acts 5:12-16

Reflection: The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same writer and were almost certainly intended as one story in two parts. That's why most New Testament scholars now refer to them as "Luke-Acts". This is important because the story does not end with Jesus' resurrection, or even with his ascension. Rather the story continues with those who have embraced the message and

mission of Jesus. The book of Acts also ends rather suddenly, possibly implying that the story still hadn't ended – it was to be continued by Christ-followers from generation to generation, including us.

Today's short passage from Acts gives us a glimpse of how the first believers responded to the new life they had experienced in Christ. It's clear that they couldn't help but share Christ's life in every way and at every opportunity they could. Notice, firstly, that these believers were committed to meeting together. They recognised their need to stay in community to keep their experience of Jesus' life strong. Secondly, they couldn't help but be a healing community, and the people around them felt and appreciated this. Finally, even those who were too afraid to join them held them in high regard. When we're really following Jesus, we may be persecuted, and we may experience resistance from others, but there is always a sense that people recognise our courage and conviction and respect it – even if they are threatened by it.

How can you allow Christ's resurrection life to flow through you to others today?

Practice for Today: The connection with community is very strong in today's reading. It wasn't just that the believers met together. They also gathered in the Temple along with their Jewish companions (remember the first Christians were all Jews). But, they were also deeply connected into the wider community, which is why they were able to make such an impact. Today, try to connect with other people of all sorts in as many ways as you can.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, for your resurrection community which enables me to share and enjoy your life.

Friday 01 April 2016

Reading: Psalm 150

Reflection: The Book of Psalms closes with today's reading – a short but powerful declaration of praise to God. The feeling of this Psalm is of an outburst of uncontrollable joy and celebration at who God is. All of creation (everything that has breath, heaven, the sanctuary) is invited to share in this declaration of praise, and a wide

variety of expressions is embraced – wind and brass, strings and percussion, dancing and singing.

It is significant that this is how the Psalter ends, especially when we consider all that has gone before. Throughout the five books of the Psalms we journey through every human emotion and circumstance – grief, lament and suffering, persecution and conflict, sin and guilt, joy and prosperity, victory and success, love and friendship, security and peace. The list goes on and on! Yet, at the end of it all, once human life is considered in all of its seasons and experiences, God remains God and is always worthy of our praise. It's a wonderful affirmation of God's presence, power, and goodness through every human experience – and it's a very fitting way to end this amazing collection of songs.

As we continue to remember and celebrate the resurrection, this Psalm is an appropriate call to praise. It's a great reminder that, whatever we may encounter, whatever life may throw at us, God's life is unquenched, and God's presence never abandons us. Even when the worst of the world's evil was thrown at Jesus, he remained gracious, loving, true, and just. And, not even death could overcome the power of God's love in Christ. How can you remember and celebrate God's life and love today?

Practice for Today: At the heart of all celebration is a spirit of thanksgiving. When we give thanks, we remember all that God is and does for us, and it inspires us to respond in hopeful, celebratory praise. Why not make today a day of thanksgiving?

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I remember who you are and all you have done, O God, I praise you.

Saturday 02 April 2016

Reading: Luke 24:36-40

Reflection: After yesterday's celebration and affirmation, it is important that we remember that praise and confidence are not always so easy to sustain. Tomorrow the Gospel reading tells the story of Thomas' doubts about the resurrection, and today's reading from Luke's Gospel reveals a similar struggle with doubt. The setting is the gathering of the disciples as the two from the Emmaus road

told of their encounter with the Risen Jesus. Then, when Jesus suddenly appeared among them, the disciples struggled to believe what they were seeing. Finally, almost in exasperation, Jesus showed them his nail-scarred hands and feet, and, when even that was not enough (as we would see if we kept reading), he took some food and ate it in front of them to show that he was not a ghost.

It's comforting to know that Jesus' closest followers found faith so hard even when faced with the Risen Jesus right in front of them. It's easy to remember only the courage and conviction that they showed later in their lives as they willingly endured persecution, imprisonment and death for Christ's sake, and to forget how hard won it was. In the light of this, we may learn to be less hard on ourselves and others when we struggle to believe without having experienced the dramatic miracles that the disciples did. Yet, no matter how tough it may be to stay faithful in our belief, it is nevertheless something that we need to work to sustain and grow. Faith may be hard, but Christ's life and presence are available to us. We just need to keep working on our hearts and lives to grow in our ability to trust and follow the way of Jesus.

What do you need to do to grow your faith in resurrection today?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to keep our faith strong is to stay mindful of Christ's presence and grace, and to remember the way resurrection continues to work in our lives and our world. One of the best ways to remember resurrection is to spend time meditating on the Scriptures that tell the stories of resurrection.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I study the Scriptures, Jesus, keep me mindful of your resurrection.

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