

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

03 - 09 April 2016

Thought for the Week:

All the readings from the Revised common Lectionary this week call us to celebrate God's goodness and love. In the Gospel reading, Thomas, who had not been with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them, wrestled with faith until, finally, he also encountered the Risen Christ. But, when he did, he responded in praise and celebration. The Gospel writer uses Thomas as an example of the journey which we must all share as we come to faith. Then, in the Revelation, we see the reason for all this praise and celebration as we receive a vision of Christ not just as Risen, but as glorified. These two truths of our faith always go together - Christ is Risen, and Christ is glorified

Unfortunately, we often misunderstand both of these truths, making Christ out to be some sort of military conqueror who uses violence and domination to destroy his enemies. But, the New Testament is clear that both the resurrection and the glory of Christ flow from his death. We make a mistake when we define God's Reign according to how human empires work. Rather, the Reign of God, the victory and the glory of Christ must all be understood through the lens of the cross. Our celebration, then, is not of a conquering Emperor, but of a humble servant, and of the life that is found in bringing life to others in acts of love, compassion, service, generosity and justice.

This week, let's celebrate the life and glory that Jesus revealed, and offered to us, through the way of the cross.

Sunday 03 April 2016

Reading: Revelation 1:4-8

Reflection: The Revelation is often viewed as a book of judgement and "hellfire and damnation". Sometimes, as Christians, we might be tempted to view this vision with some glee as a picture of how "all those evil people" finally "get what's coming to them" while we stand by in smug satisfaction. Could anything be further from the message

of selfless love that Jesus preached? What Revelation is really trying to do is offer comfort to a persecuted Church by reminding them of who Jesus is, and of the Reign of God which supersedes all human empires not through military conquest, but through sacrificial love. However, since to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus was seen as treason, the writer of the Revelation uses the "code" of Old Testament imagery to communicate his message – since the Christians would recognise and understand it, while the Roman officials would not. Much of the book of Revelation can be found in the Old Testament apocalyptic prophets of Daniel and Ezekiel.

It's amazing how easily we miss the connections between the glorified Jesus who is celebrated in this vision, and the suffering Jesus of the Gospels. But, those connections must be remembered if we are to understand John's message and celebrate rightly. That's why, in today's reading, when John speaks of Jesus' return, he mentions that "those who pierced him" will also see him – because Jesus is always known by his scars.

John also tells us that Jesus is the "first to rise from the dead" – not the last or the only. This means that we are to follow Jesus into resurrection, and into lives that experience and share the life and glory of God. This is certainly cause for celebration!

Practice for Today: We often think of celebration as having a party. But, we can also celebrate people by honouring them and what they stand for through following their example. Today, why not celebrate Jesus through acts of kindness to those around you?

Breath-Prayer for Today: I see your glory in your sacrifice, Jesus, and I seek to follow your example.

Monday 04 April 2016

Reading: Psalm 122

Reflection: Jerusalem is the centre of the hopes and dreams of God's people and it has been for centuries. This Psalm reveals the devotion God's people feel toward this ancient city, and the celebration that they associate with it. Here the Temple invites people to encounter God in worship. Here the throne of the king – the representative of God's Reign on earth – is found. The faith of

God's people was that, if Jerusalem knew peace, so too would the people who lived in it.

The meditation of Holy Week, which we recently experienced, reveals a different side to this city, though. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem as the city which killed the prophets – and it was the place of his own death. But, Jerusalem is also the place of resurrection, and the place in which the hope of God's Reign being fully manifested on earth is depicted – especially in the New Jerusalem of the Revelation. It's amazing how one city can come to mean so much to so many.

For us today, Jerusalem is a metaphor for living the resurrection life, for being citizens of God's Reign. And, in the same way that the Psalmist celebrates Jerusalem as his home, and prays for the peace of this city, so we celebrate our "Jerusalem" – our home in God's Reign – and we pray for God's peace to fill us and our world.

The final line of this Psalm offers a challenge. "I will seek what is best for you Jerusalem". This is the Psalmist's commitment. Today, how can you commit to seeking what is best for God's Reign?

Practice for Today: One of the marks of spiritual maturity is when we shift from praying for our own needs and desires, to praying more for the needs of others. When we give our lives to something bigger than ourselves, our lives get bigger and more vibrant, and we begin to experience life more deeply and share life more widely. Today, allow your practice of prayer to move you deeper into this life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your sake, Jesus, I will seek what is best for the Reign of God.

Tuesday 05 April 2016

Reading: Esther 8:1-17

Reflection: The story of the Book of Esther is one of intrigue, murder and suspense. It is set in the Persian Empire during the Reign of King Xerxes. Many Jews, who had been exiled to Babylon (which was then conquered by Persia) were living in this Empire, and were the victims of harsh and violent anti-Semitism. But, then a young Jewish girl by the name of Esther found herself in the king's

harem. When one of the king's officials began to plot against the Jews, Esther was called on to approach the king to defend her people. Today's reading tells how the plot turned out. Haman, the evil official, ended up losing his life, but not before he had managed to get the king to sign a decree that all Jews should be attacked and killed on a certain day. This posed a problem for Esther, and her uncle Mordecai, because no decree of the king could be revoked. So, what they did was to give the Jewish people permission to fight back – which meant that their persecutors were effectively disarmed. It is sad, though, that those who were threatened then used the king's decree to do violence to their enemies.

It is all too easy, though, in today's world, for self-defence to become a catalyst for growing spirals of violence. Although at times, it may seem like force is the best way to protect ourselves against force, it often backfires – as both nations and individuals have discovered throughout history. That's why Jesus strongly advocated for non-violence, teaching his followers to "turn the other cheek" and refusing to retaliate when he was executed. But, at the heart of Jesus' way is faith in the resurrection. When we know that nothing can ultimately destroy life, we have no need to resort to violence for any reason. Rather, we allow the resurrection to work through us and bring life and peace to the world. This is easier said than lived, but it remains one of the most basic challenges of following Jesus.

How can you embrace the peace-loving, life-trusting way of Jesus today?

Practice for Today: One of the problems with moving to violence, whether as an aggressor or in self-defence, is that it makes reconciliation impossible. However, when we are willing to pay the price to love even in the face of violence, it becomes possible to turn enemies into friends. Today, whenever you are tempted to use violence as a response, seek to love instead.

Breath-Prayer for Today: By believing in your resurrection life, Jesus, I can follow you in the way of peace and love.

Wednesday 06 April 2016

Reading: Luke 12:4-12

Reflection: One of the biggest threats to peace in our world – both on a global scale and within personal relationships – is self-interest. When we place our own needs – for security, comfort, pleasure or power – above our commitment to our companions in this life, we inevitably cause conflict, pain and a breakdown in relationships. The resurrection message is a strong antidote to this disease. When we are touched and transformed by the resurrection life of Jesus, we become people who long to share life with others. Our self-interest falls away in favour of seeking the common good.

This is the spirit behind today's reading. Jesus is comparing God's way with the way of religious leaders who oppress and exploit others, using the law, for their own benefit. This meant that those who refused to follow their legalistic demands would be putting themselves in danger. That's why Jesus encourages his followers not to fear human beings, but rather to fear God. God may sound like a rather fierce being in verse 5, but in verse 6 and 7, God is shown to be the most attentive, compassionate and caring parent – aware of the needs of even a lowly sparrow.

Those who follow Jesus need to strive to be as caring as the God they follow. To fail to do so is like denying God and claiming that God is not loving and that God's way is not good – which is probably what is meant by blaspheming the Spirit. Yet, when we trust in God's way of love, and in the resurrection life of Jesus, we know that, whatever trials we may face, God will carry us through.

How can you "lean into" God's love and strength today?

Practice for Today: Although love can be difficult and painful, God promises that God's Spirit will always be available to strengthen and inspire us. Today, whenever you need God's strength, offer a prayer of invocation and open yourself to God's Spirit.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I am challenged and tested, O Spirit, come and strengthen me, I pray.

Thursday 07 April 2016

Reading: Revelation 3:14-22

Reflection: Today's reading has often been used in evangelistic sermons to invite those who are not Christ-followers to come to

faith. The image of Jesus knocking has become a common one when people are invited to respond to Christ. However, as we see in today's passage, this image was originally addressed to Christians. The Book of Revelation starts with seven letters to seven churches. These were churches that existed at that time and that were experiencing persecution under the Roman Empire. Each letter gives us a window into how different Christian communities were responding to their circumstances. But, each letter also reveals the different ways we respond to life's challenges and persecutions.

The letter to the Laodicean Church, which we read today, is not good news. The people of this community had lost their passion, and were living a faith that was neither true to Jesus, nor completely opposed to his ways. Yet, they were unaware of their poverty of spirit. They thought of themselves as rich and secure. This is why Jesus challenges them to receive his discipline, to open their eyes, to renew their commitment, and to release their indifference. If we truly believe in resurrection, we can't make our faith only about lip service – it must become the focal point of our entire lives – even in the toughest of times.

As we read this, we can't help but recognise that Jesus is also knocking on the door of our hearts. Today, can you open your heart and allow the life of Jesus to take hold a little more?

Practice for Today: You can't follow Jesus and stay the same. Every time you open your heart a little more to Jesus, and allow his life to take hold, you are changed. The old ways of indifference and self-satisfaction fall away, and the new ways of love, passion and service begin to take over. But, for this to happen, we need to be people of repentance, responding always to Jesus' call. Today, whenever you find yourself slipping into indifference, offer a prayer of confession and commit to change.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I hear you knocking, Jesus, and I open my heart to you.

Friday 08 April 2016

Reading: Psalm 30

Reflection: On Sunday the Gospel reading tells the story of Peter's restoration. In a scene that is reminiscent of Luke's account of Peter's first call, John's Gospel describes how Jesus guides Peter to a huge catch of fish. Then, Jesus takes Peter for a walk and gently, but lovingly restores his call. It's one of the great moments of grace in the Gospels.

Psalms 30 describes a similar experience of restoration. The Psalmist remembers a time when he was prosperous and felt untouchable, but then he got into trouble. The details are not mentioned, but what is clear is that the Psalmist cried out for help and experienced God's rescue. The final verses are a celebration of how God has turned "mourning into dancing".

One of the most profound and transforming gifts of the resurrection is this promise of restoration. No matter how much we have gone astray, no matter how far we may have fallen, no matter how desperate our situation may seem, the resurrection proclaims that we are always in reach of God's salvation. There is no situation so bleak that God's life cannot resurrect it. There is no act so regrettable that God cannot forgive it. There is no life so lost that God cannot restore it. We all have times when we feel lost and hopeless, but, even though God's rescue may not come in a form we desire, it does always come – often in surprising and unexpected ways. Where do you need resurrection to work in your life today?

Practice for Today: At the heart of today's Psalm is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's rescue. In tough times we can boost our faith and our strength by remembering what God has done for us in the past, and giving thanks for God's resurrection. Make today a journey of thankful remembering.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your gift of resurrection, which has restored me in the past and will do again, I give you thanks, O God.

Saturday 09 April 2016

Reading: Luke 14:12-14

Reflection: Reciprocity is a high value in our world. If we give a birthday gift, we expect that the recipient will give us a birthday gift when our time comes. If we are invited to a meal at a friend's home,

we feel the obligation to offer an invitation in return. The problem with this system is that it excludes those who have nothing to give, or who cannot repay us in kind. This means that those who become indebted in some way, end up in a destructive cycle of growing obligation with no means to fulfil what is demanded. In a sense, this is what happened to Peter. After being called by Jesus and experiencing all that the Reign of God offers, Peter's fear finally overcame him and, in a moment of crisis he denied knowing Jesus. This was a "debt" that he could never repay. But, fortunately for Peter, and for us, the Reign of God is not based on reciprocity.

In the parable we read today, Jesus challenges the culture of reciprocity, and invites us into a different way of being. Instead of only offering hospitality and kindness to those who can repay us, Jesus calls us to make a special effort to give to those who have no means to repay us – and to do so expecting nothing back. This is a culture of generosity, inclusivity and sharing that ensures that no one is ever caught up in a never-ending cycle of indebtedness. It is also a culture in which giving becomes its own reward and the quest for repayment falls away. It was in this spirit that Jesus forgave and restored Peter.

Who needs you to release them from their "indebtedness" today? How can you extend hospitality to those who cannot repay you?

Practice for Today: When we remember that we are included in God's grace and God's family not because we have earned it, but simply because God desires it, we can't help but extend the same hospitality to others. Today, try to give a gift of some kind to someone who cannot repay you – and let him or her know that there are no strings attached.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have welcomed and accepted me freely, O God, so I welcome and accept others in your name.

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