

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

10 - 16 April 2016

Thought for the Week:

All the readings in the Lectionary this week speak of living with a sense of call. This does not mean that we all have to be apostles, or become ordained, full-time ministers in the church. Rather, it means that, as we embrace the resurrected way of life, we discover that our lives are not random. How we live and what we do matter. The small actions, attitudes, words, and thoughts that fill our days can contribute to revealing God's Reign in our world, or they can help to keep God's Reign hidden. When we embrace the resurrection not just as a past, historical event, but as a calling to live daily in the power of God's life, then our lives make a positive difference in the world. In this sense, we are all called.

When we make the resurrection nothing more than a past miracle, or a hope for a future life after death, we rob it of its power to impact our lives now. This is why the Scriptures constantly call us to see the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a journey that we must also experience. Each day gives us an opportunity to release our own desires, agendas, and self-protectiveness, and to be raised to a life that is centred around the love, justice, and grace of God. Each day offers us a chance to share God's life with those around us. And each day offers us the gift of experiencing God's love for ourselves a little more. When we receive these opportunities with gratitude and mindfulness, we discover that everything we do is filled with a sense of meaning, purpose and life. This is what it means to live a called life.

This week we will meditate on living with the sense of call that comes from a daily experience of God's resurrection life.

Sunday 10 April 2016

Reading: John 21:1-19

Reflection: The basic elements of the story of Peter's restoration are very well known. In Luke's Gospel, the call of Peter comes when

Jesus shows him how to catch a large quantity of fish. Now, in John's Gospel, the resurrected Jesus does the same thing as a precursor to renewing Peter's call. Then, after cooking breakfast for the disciples, Jesus asks three times if Peter loves him – once for each denial – and Peter responds that he does. Each time Jesus instructs Peter to feed his sheep. Finally, Jesus makes it clear that Peter's life will no longer be guided by his own desires and agendas, but by those of Jesus' mission. He also implies that Peter will die in a similar way to his own death – which, history tells us is what happened (Peter was crucified upside down). Finally, Jesus repeats the classic words of call: "Follow me". This early morning encounter between is a story of immense grace and love, and it reminds us that nothing can place us beyond the reach of God's mercy.

While Peter's call was unique, it is also a model for how we are all called. The basis for Peter's call is not his ability, or "goodness". He is called because of the love and grace of Jesus. The call is not for his own sake, but in order that Jesus' "sheep" – his followers – might be nourished. And finally, the call is to follow Jesus – to live with the same compassion, justice and grace that Jesus did. All of this applies to every one of us. We are all called because of God's grace. We are all called to nourish and care for one another. And we are called to follow the life and mission of Jesus.

How is God calling you to follow Jesus today?

Practice for Today: When we gather for worship, we usually have a call to worship at the start of our gathering. This is not just about helping us to focus on Jesus for the next hour. It's a reminder that our whole life is called to connect with and reflect God's life. Throughout today, remind yourself that you are called to worship God in every word, thought and action.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I hear your call, Jesus, and I commit to following you.

Monday 11 April 2016

Reading: Acts 9:19b-31

Reflection: Saul – who became the apostle Paul – must have been a really frustrating person to have around. At first he was so

passionate about his faith that he was determined to eradicate the followers of Jesus. But, then, once he had encountered Jesus for himself, he became so passionate about the mission of Jesus that he consistently angered those who were opposed to the new Christian movement. The result was that Paul regularly received death threats and was constantly being protected and shepherded to safety by other believers!

Paul's passion was not always easy for others to accept. When he came to Jerusalem the believers were, at first, afraid of him, because of his reputation as an opponent of the followers of Jesus. But, thankfully a man called Barnabas trusted Paul and welcomed him into the circle of believers. Paul and Barnabas demonstrate two different ways that we can follow the call of Christ. Paul was confrontational, eloquent, and persuasive, and he used his words and ideas to convince people of Jesus' way. Barnabas was relational, welcoming, and friendly, and he used his gracious acceptance to draw people into the community of faith. Both gifts are necessary for the church to grow as it did in verse 31. The key for us is not to try and be a Paul or a Barnabas, but to be who God has made us to be, and to use our abilities to follow the call of Christ and touch others with Christ's love.

What gifts has God given you to demonstrate the Reign of God?

Practice for Today: When we share in the act of giving in worship, we usually focus on money. Certainly it is important that we are generous with whatever "wealth" we may possess. But, giving of money is really just a symbolic act in which we bring all our gifts to God. Every talent, ability, and resource we have can be used for God's Reign. Today, explore what you can give to others in Christ's name as a way of proclaiming God's Reign.

Breath-Prayer for Today: All you have given me, O God, I give back to you for the sake of your Reign.

Tuesday 12 April 2016

Reading: Psalm 121

Reflection: Psalm 121 is one of a collection of Psalms known as the "songs of ascent" – because pilgrims going up to the Temple in

Jerusalem sang them in procession. In this Psalm, the writer affirms that no mountain – not even the Temple Mount – can provide complete protection and security, but God watches over our whole lives. Throughout the Psalm, in the Hebrew, one word keeps recurring – "to keep" or "to guard". God is the one who "keeps" or "guards" our lives, and God never sleeps on the job! This doesn't mean that no harm can come to those who are guarded by God. The sense is that, though life may contain suffering and difficulties, the whole sweep of our lives is under God's care, and ultimately no evil (which is one translation of the word "harm" in verse 7) will overcome us. It's a promise that nothing can separate us from God's presence and care.

As we continue to remember the resurrection, and respond to God's call to follow Jesus through death into life, it can be tempting to view faith in resurrection as a safeguard against suffering. When we allow ourselves to fall into this view of faith, we make it very hard for us to enter any situation where caring for or defending others might place us in harm's way. If faith is about staying safe, we will never allow ourselves to go to the places where the worst suffering and evil lurks, for fear of being hurt. But, when we believe in resurrection as a way through death to life, we can embrace the suffering of others and of our world in order to bring Christ's life to those in need. The concern then is not for our own safety, but for our faith to lead us to be the hands and feet, the love and compassion of Christ to all.

Where is God calling you to trust in resurrection and step out of your safety to touch others with the love of Jesus?

Practice for Today: Prayer can sometimes be used as a way to protect ourselves from life's difficulties. Instead of engaging with the suffering of the world, we retreat into our safe homes and churches and pray. But, this is actually the opposite of what prayer is meant to be. When we pray, we place ourselves at God's disposal, seek to see the world from God's perspective, and open ourselves to God's call to be agents of God's wholeness to the world. Can you pray like this today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray, O God, show me how to be an agent of your wholeness to others today.

Wednesday 13 April 2016

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

Reflection: The famous story of Isaiah's call is both inspiring and challenging. Isaiah was a politician in the king's court. He went to the Temple feeling grief for the loss of the good King Uzziah who had died. This was a time of uncertainty for him and for the nation. But, in the Temple, Isaiah was confronted with a vision of God that completely changed him. As he gazed on God's glory, he feared for his life, because he lived at a time when people believed that seeing God meant certain death. But, instead of being consumed by God's holiness, Isaiah was cleansed from his uncleanness. Then, when he hears God's call, he could not help but respond. He may have entered the Temple as a politician, but he left it as a prophet.

The call of God came in two ways to Isaiah. In the first place he had to face his uncleanness. As he admitted his brokenness, he was able to receive God's cleansing and be equipped for his call. Then, when he heard God asking who God would send, Isaiah must have seen something in himself that made him realise he could be the one. He didn't only see his sin, he also saw his glory and ability, and when he did, he offered it to God. In a sense, as Isaiah was called, he also experiences a kind of resurrection – and this enabled him to respond to God's call.

How can you open yourself to this healing, inspiring resurrection experience in your own life – and live as a "Called One" today?

Practice for Today: The act of confession is about facing what needs to change in us so that we can live our best lives, and serve God most faithfully. Today, whenever you are faced with parts of yourself that need healing and cleansing, offer a prayer of confession and receive God's grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I acknowledge that I am unclean, O God, but I receive your grace and healing.

Thursday 14 April 2016

Reading: Revelation 5:1-10

Reflection: Today's reading is one of the most dramatic scenes in the whole book of Revelation. In his vision, John sees a scroll in

God's hand, but no one is found who can open the scroll. The scroll appears to contain the events that will bring about the consummation of God's saving purposes in the world, so if no one can open it, this is a great tragedy. But, then, the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" is found worthy to open the scroll. This sounds like a glorious and powerful person, but, what John actually sees is "a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered"! This is an awesome depiction of how different God's view of glory and power is from our human perspective. Then, heaven rejoices and worships Jesus – this "slaughtered Lamb".

This Sunday, we will read from John's Gospel where Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd. As we reflect on the resurrection, this is an important image. It reminds us that Jesus' life is given to lead us to life and to bring us into the "fold" of God's "flock". This "Lamb who was slain" is also our Shepherd who cares for and guides us. But, we are also called to be "shepherds" to one another – in the same way as Peter was instructed to "feed my sheep" by Jesus. If Jesus is our example, then it means that we too must lay down our lives for one another in order that we may all experience God's resurrection.

Who needs you to lay down your life for them today?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways we can care for those around us is to really listen to them, and then respond to what we hear in acts of kindness and service. We are all shepherds of someone – whether it's our children, our spouses, our parents, or our friends – and they all need this careful, compassionate listening and loving sometimes. Try it today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you laid down your life for me, Jesus, so I lay down my life for others.

Friday 15 April 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 20:39-44

Reflection: One of the most challenging features of the Gospel is that we don't get what we deserve. This is also one of the most liberating truths, because if we did, we would all have to face the consequences that our worst selves bring on us. But, God always

responds to us with undeserved grace and forgiveness. The way Jesus restored Peter after the resurrection is one clear example of this. Jesus' promise to be our Good Shepherd is another.

In today's reading, the people of Israel, who are living in exile as a consequence of ignoring the warnings of the prophets, receive a word of grace from God. Even as God recognises their tendency to idolatry, God also knows that the time will come when the people will realise that their idols cannot satisfy them. And then, when they turn back to God, God promises to accept them and to be merciful to them, in spite of their wickedness. It's interesting that God states that it is this mercy that will enable them to know that God is the Lord. This reveals that grace and mercy are not things that God does. They are central to who God is – they are expressions of God's nature as infinite love.

Where do you need God's mercy today? How can you open yourself to this gracious love that leads you to life?

Practice for Today: Sometimes, when things go badly, or when we fail, we are tempted to believe that God has abandoned us in order to punish us. But, if Jesus is to be believed, this is not how God operates. Rather, God comes alongside us in our suffering with grace, mercy, and strength. Today, in any moments of struggle or suffering, remember God's presence by offering a prayer of invocation, inviting God's spirit to be with you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In whatever dark valleys I must navigate, O God, may your Spirit be with me and guide me.

Saturday 16 April 2016

Reading: Luke 12:29-32

Reflection: If Jesus is our Good Shepherd – as tomorrow's Gospel reading describes – then we are his flock. That means that we are a community of followers of Jesus who all draw our sense of security and belonging from one another and from our Shepherd. When we are part of such a "flock", such a caring community, we do not have to worry about our basic human needs, because God provides for us through one another. Whatever "pasture" one member of the flock enjoys, is available to all. So, whatever resources of time,

talents or treasures we may have should be available to the whole flock. This is what it means to be part of God's kingdom, and this is why Jesus teaches that if we seek the kingdom above all else we will have everything we need. This is also why it gives God pleasure to "give us the Kingdom" – it is in becoming true participants in God's Reign that we learn to share and care for one another, and what parent doesn't love to see his or her children sharing and supporting each other?

The idea of the Kingdom of God here has nothing to do with life after death, or a personal route out of this world into heavenly bliss. It's a way of being in this world that is completely different from the individualistic, self-interested tendencies of human society. It's best described by the Jubilee vision of Luke 4:14-21 – where the poor are uplifted, the oppressed are freed, and the captives are liberated. If only we could really learn to seek this Kingdom above all else!

What needs in your life are a concern to you today? How can seeking God's Kingdom first help you to address those needs?

Practice for Today: In order to seek God's Kingdom first, we need to be captured by a vision of what God's Kingdom really is. Two practices that are very effective at revealing God's Kingdom are the reading of Scripture, and praise. In Scripture we see how Jesus lived and taught about God's Kingdom, and when we respond to what we read in praise, we open our hearts for this vision to take hold of us. Today, allow these two practices to sow the seeds of God's Reign in your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, Jesus, for the kingdom which you proclaimed, and which you offer to me now.

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