

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

17 - 23 April 2016

Thought for the Week:

The question of Jesus' identity arises often in John's Gospel. While the other Gospels make much of Jesus' frequent instruction for those who recognised him as Messiah not to tell anyone, John's Gospel does not emphasize this "Messianic secret" as much. Rather, in passages like the Gospel reading for this Sunday, Jesus seems quite comfortable to claim the title of Messiah – although still in an enigmatic way. One thing is very clear in all of the Gospels – Jesus was very different kind of Messiah from the one the people expected. This is why the question of faith is central to John's Gospel. As in this week's reading, John constantly contrasts those who fail to believe (or who believe only in miracles) and those whose faith is genuine.

At the heart of John's picture of Jesus is the final statement in today's reading: "The Father and I are one". This is not a statement about God's gender. It's a statement about God's nature. If we want to know what God is like, we need only look to Jesus. Any time our ideas about God contradict what we see in Jesus, we must know that we've misunderstood God. Jesus reveals what God is really like – offensively inclusive, radically compassionate, restoratively just, and self-sacrificially loving. This week our meditations will lead us into a deeper glimpse of how Jesus – the Good Shepherd – reveals God to us.

Sunday 17 April 2016

Reading: John 10:22-30

Reflection: In John 10 Jesus uses the metaphor of a Good Shepherd to describe his mission. It's easy to miss how provocative this would have been for the people of Jesus' time. They would immediately have thought of Old Testament passages (like Ezekiel 34) in which the corrupt leaders of Israel were referred to as wicked shepherds, and in which God promised to be a Good Shepherd to

God's people. This means that in claiming to be the Good Shepherd, Jesus was stating pretty clearly that he was God's Messiah. Yet, the people still asked him to tell them plainly whether he was the Messiah or not. To adapt the old saying: "There's none so deaf as those who will not hear."

There are a number of reasons why the Shepherd image is so powerful. Remember, first of all, that Jesus was speaking to a pastoral people whose livelihood was deeply connected to the land, and to the animals that they raised on it. Remember, also, that sheep were "clean" animals, often used for sacrifices, and so they represented what was acceptable to God, what was "clean" and what was righteous and good. So, as the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed to be one who cares for and protects God's people – no one can snatch them away from him. What a comforting commitment Jesus makes toward us in this simple statement! Also, when he refers to his followers as sheep, he is saying that those who follow his way are "clean", righteous and acceptable to God. How good it is to know that following Jesus leads us into the way God calls us to live.

What does it mean for you today that Jesus is your Shepherd?

Practice for Today: The practice of praise teaches us to see the world from God's perspective. As we focus our attention and our devotion on God, we begin to see God's values, God's mission, and God's view. This, then, changes how we see ourselves, others and our world. Today, allow the act of praise to connect you more deeply with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, Jesus, because you are my Good Shepherd, and I am part of your flock.

Monday 18 April 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 37:15-28

Reflection: Today's reading, from Ezekiel's prophecy, would have been a word of tremendous hope and comfort to the people of God living in exile. Their history had been one of division among the tribes of Israel, and of conquest by their enemies, but here God promises to restore their fortunes and reunite all the tribes into a

single people of God again. What a wonderful dream this was – and what a wonderful dream it would be for us to live in a world united by our common humanity, rather than divided by race, gender, sexuality, language, culture, economic level and nationality.

One of the key features of this prophecy, though, is the promise that God's people will no longer pollute themselves with idolatry, but will have as their ruler a leader like David (which was a reference to the hoped-for Messiah). The problem with idolatry is not that we bruise God's ego, or divert our worship away from God. The problem with idolatry is that it forms ideas in our minds about God that are wrong, destructive and divisive. When we see God as violent, angry or exclusive, we become like this. But, when we see God as a Good Shepherd, as Jesus revealed, it makes us compassionate, inclusive and peaceful. This is why we need to be free of idolatry, which, as A.W. Tozer said, is simply holding ideas about God that are unworthy of God.

What "idolatrous" ideas about God do you need to release today?

Practice for Today: Our view of God is often shaped by our background. For example, we may see God through the lens of our father or mother, or a priest or minister with whom we interacted as a child. Hopefully, these people loved and accepted us and so gave us a healthy foundation for our view of God, but this is not always the case. And, even if they were excellent parents and pastors, they were still imperfect. This is why it's important that we meditate on the Jesus that is revealed in the Gospels, and allow the vision of God that Jesus revealed to shape our ideas about God. Try to meditate on the Gospels like this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me yourself, O God, as I meditate on Jesus, who revealed you to the world.

Tuesday 19 April 2016

Reading: Acts 9:32-35

Reflection: The book of Acts is full of stories that reveal how the people of the early church embraced the reality of Jesus' resurrection for themselves. It is clear that the apostles didn't see the resurrection as something that Jesus did "for them" or "to them"

or that only promised life after death. Resurrection was a reality in which they participated. As they had experienced Jesus as their Good Shepherd, the first disciples sought to be good shepherds to those around them, bringing grace, love, healing and life wherever they could.

In today's reading we see Peter, in particular, fulfilling this call. Jesus had instructed him to "Feed my sheep" and he was obeying with passion. The healing of Aeneas resonates with Jesus' healing of the paralysed man in Luke 5 – both Jesus and Peter invited the men they healed to pick up their mats and walk – so Peter was following Jesus' example. The result of this healing, though, was not just that one man got better. Peter made sure everyone knew it was the life of Jesus that made the difference, and so many people in that community came to faith.

We may not know such dramatic miracles in our own journey with Jesus, but as we allow God's life to fill us and flow through us, there is no question that those around us will feel the effect and find comfort, healing, grace and life through us. How can you open yourself to this life-giving flow today?

Practice for Today: God's gift of the Holy Spirit enables us to know and experience God's presence and power in our daily experiences and circumstances. Today, whenever you, or someone near you, need a touch of God's grace, offer a prayer of invocation, inviting God's Spirit to work through you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Good Shepherd, by your Spirit, allow your life to flow into and through me, I pray.

Wednesday 20 April 2016

Reading: Jeremiah 50:17-20

Reflection: We all feel like the Israelites sometimes – like sheep that have been scattered by lions. We may not have had our homeland conquered by powerful nations, and we may not have become refugees, but we all know what it is like to feel disconnected, crushed by the antagonism of others, or lost and alone with little hope and much fear. Life is hard and often painful, and faith is no guarantee of protection. But, as God promised the

Israelites, so God promises us to give us a home in God's own presence, and to carry us through our suffering to life and joy.

Jesus may have been thinking of Jeremiah's prophecy when he looked at the people who were following him in Mark's Gospel (6:34). His response was to teach them – feeding them spiritually and intellectually – and then to feed them physically. As a Good Shepherd, Jesus sought to give the people a sense of comfort and safety, even though they were living in very difficult times. This is also why, when the people refused to follow his teaching, Jesus grieved, because he knew that they would bring even more pain and disaster on themselves.

Whatever you may face today, open yourself to God's sustenance and enfolding love. And, if you encounter others who need a touch of grace, seek to be a good shepherd to them.

Practice for Today: One of the most comforting gifts we have been given is the gift of prayer. Not only does it remind us of God's grace and strength, it also enables us to care for others and share God's love with them. Today, as you go through your usual routines, try to offer short prayers for others and yourself in every situation.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When life makes me feel lost and fearful, Jesus, help me to experience your presence as my Good Shepherd.

Thursday 21 April 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 2:8-3:11

Reflection: Ezekiel's calling was not an easy one. God instructed him, first of all, to speak hard words to people who had already experienced the pain of conquest and exile. But, these hard words were necessary for the people to make the changes that would bring them healing. That's why the scroll, although it was covered with words of judgement, tasted sweet in Ezekiel's mouth. Yet, in spite of this God warned the prophet that the people would not want to hear his message, which is why God made Ezekiel as stubborn, obstinate and hard headed as they were. Isn't it good to know that even someone with these character traits is necessary and useful in God's Reign?

The other instruction God gives Ezekiel is to ensure that whatever he preaches to the people he must allow to take root in his own heart first. He is to listen to his own words and live them out in his own life, and only then can he go to other people and teach them. Of course, this is common sense, but it's surprising how many people of faith are quick to point fingers at others before ensuring that their own lives reflect the values they are proclaiming.

What surprising character traits are in you that God might want to use today? And what values that you preach to others do you need to implement in your own life?

Practice for Today: Confession is not always about what we're doing wrong. Sometimes it's just about getting honest with God about who we are and what's going on in our lives. In this case, there is no need for forgiveness, because we haven't done anything wrong, necessarily. But, there is a need to allow God to guide us and show us how to live our most authentic lives. Today, take stock of your life by spending some time in honest confession.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me, O God, who you have made me to be and how you want to use me.

Friday 22 April 2016

Reading: Daniel 7:13-14

Reflection: Jesus, in the Gospels, referenced these two verses from Daniel's prophecy when he predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. The book of Daniel depicts great upheaval in the world, but in the midst of it this "one like a son of man" is ushered into God's presence like a victorious warrior and is honoured and given authority over the nations. The Reign that he establishes is unending. Jesus used this to describe the new reality that was now present in the world because of his teaching and sacrifice, and to proclaim that his Reign would not be destroyed, even though, on the surface, it would look like the Roman Empire had destroyed him and his followers.

When we read a few verses like this out of context, it can be tempting to see the Reign of God in terms of military conquest, imperial power, and material wealth – even though we may couch these ideas in "spiritual" language. When we see God's Reign as

just another conquering Empire, though, we miss the power of Jesus message. On Sunday we will read about Jesus' new commandment – to love one another as he has loved us. This is what God's Reign is really all about – not conquest, but service; not wealth, but generosity; not Empire, but community.

What does it mean for you today to live as a citizen of this Realm of love?

Practice for Today: We like to think of love as a feeling, which means we can claim to be loving while doing little that impacts our lives in any significant way. However, Jesus made it very clear (by washing his disciples' feet) that he viewed love as practical. It's about what we do more than what we feel. Today, use every opportunity to love those around you through practical actions, more than through words.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have loved me, Jesus, so I seek to love those around me.

Saturday 23 April 2016

Reading: Revelation 11:15-19

Reflection: The dramatic scene which John describes in today's reading is meant to convey one single truth: "The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." It's significant that this proclamation comes directly after a vision in which two prophets are executed, raised to life and then ascend to heaven, and just before the vision of the woman who gives birth, whose baby is taken up to God, and who is protected from the dragon who seeks to harm her. If this all sounds confusing, it's because John's vision is speaking about mysteries that are hard to express in words, and he is using language that is not meant to be taken literally. What is important, though, is that in both of these vision, which sandwich today's reading, people of God are rescued from the forces of evil, and are enabled to live even in the face of death. We must keep this in mind when we hear the proclamation that the world has become God's Kingdom. John is trying to tell us that there is nothing that can conquer or destroy God's Reign, and nothing that can destroy those who follow the way of Jesus.

In response, the twenty-four elders around God's throne burst out in worship, and proclaim God's judgement. This sounds like a violent, destructive action of God, until we remember the context. God's judgment is not violent, but loving; not destructive, but creative and re-creative. In the end, evil is not destroyed by evil means, but through God's love expressed in "resurrected" people.

Whatever evil you may face today, remember that it is God's love that "conquers" all.

Practice for Today: When we face the threat of evil, it is easy to forget God's presence and God's promises. That's why we need the practice of thanksgiving – it reminds us of what God has done, and stirs our faith for the present situation. Today, whatever evil may come your way, or that you become aware of, give thanks that it does not have the last word – love does.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In the face of evil, Jesus, I remember that nothing can conquer your love.

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