

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

01 - 07 May 2016

### **Thought for the Week:**

What does it mean for you to be at home in God's Presence? How does your faith enable you to enjoy God's welcoming hospitality? And how does it teach you to extend that hospitality to others in Christ's name? These are the questions that are raised by this week's readings. Among the Scriptures that are set for this Sunday are two passages from the Gospel of John. In one, Jesus teaches the disciples that, when he leaves them, this will make it possible for them to receive God's Spirit, who will make a home within them. Once again, Jesus offers a kind of "upside-down" hospitality – as God makes God's home within us (enjoying our hospitality, in a sense), so we are welcomed into God's life and embraced by God's hospitality. In the second reading Jesus heals a paralysed man on the Sabbath, which generates some offense from the religious leaders. In so doing, Jesus proclaims that bringing life – welcoming people into God's restoring love – is far more important than legalistic "rightness".

The challenge of such readings is that we must face our own capacity for hospitality. Inevitably there will be those whom we would wish to exclude. In the community of faith there are many debates about whether inclusivity is more important than purity, particularly as it relates to certain issues of doctrine or morality. Yet, as soon as we realise that our welcome into God's grace is pure gift, and not because of our worthiness or anything we have done to deserve it, we must recognise that God's calls us to the same radically scandalous hospitality.

This week we will be challenged to welcome all – especially those who do not deserve it.

### **Sunday 01 May 2016**

**Reading:** John 5:1-9

**Reflection:** There are at least two significant facets to today's reading. The first is Jesus' strange question to the paralysed man at the pool of Bethesda: "Would you like to get well?" The answer would seem to be obvious, but notice that the man doesn't really answer the question. Instead he makes excuses for why he has not yet been healed. It seems that this man was using his condition as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for his own life – and perhaps for the significant others in his life as well. Jesus' healing of this man (and his confrontation of him later in the chapter – see verse 14) was a challenge for him to step up to the plate and make a contribution to the world.

The second facet, which comes immediately after today's reading, is that the religious leaders became angry that the man was doing work – carrying his mat – on the Sabbath, and that a healing had happened on this holy day. For them, it was more important to obey "the rules" and to be "pure" than to bring life and liberation to others. They had misunderstood the Sabbath law, turning it into a cause for exclusion, rather than an invitation to be a part of God's liberating grace.

Both suffering and legalism can be excuses for failing to extend God's grace and hospitality to others – but neither excuse is acceptable to Jesus. Instead, Christ calls us to a radical hospitality that welcomes and brings life to all, all the time. How can you practice this hospitality today?

**Practice for Today:** It's amazing what a simple greeting can do. When we take the time to notice another person and greet them respectfully and openly, we acknowledge their humanity, and we tell them we are happy that they are in the world. Even strangers are blessed by such hospitality. Today, try to offer a friendly greeting to everyone you meet.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May I never use my struggles or my faith as an excuse to reject others, O God.

### **Monday 02 May 2016**

**Reading:** Revelation 21:5-14

**Reflection:** Once again we see God's "upside-down" hospitality at work in today's reading. Here, in John's Revelation vision, he sees the New Jerusalem – God's dwelling – descending from heaven to earth. Once again, God breaks into human experience, and invites God's Self into our world. But, in doing this, God is actually inviting us into God's world, welcoming us into God's life and encouraging us to make ourselves at home with God. Notice, though, that this New Jerusalem is called the "bride of the Lamb". This is the same language that is used of the Church in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-27. So, the image John presents, is of God's presence coming into the world through the community that is the "bride of Christ". This means that, even as we are invited to share in God's hospitality, so we are to be those who share God's hospitality with the world. This gift of God's love and grace is like living water to our thirsty souls (verse 6) and is a promise of blessing to all who are God's children.

In the midst of this invitation, verse 8 feels difficult and out of place. If God is so welcoming, why are some people rejected? It's important to recognise who these people are. They are all those who place their own quest for power or security, or their own desires and pleasures above others. So, it's not that they are excluded so much as that they exclude themselves by refusing to extend hospitality to others, and by refusing to be part of a welcoming, loving community.

How can you embrace your part in God's hospitable bride today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most welcoming things we can do for those around us, is to affirm and celebrate them as they are. God's amazing creativity is reflected in our differences and uniqueness, and so, when we honour each person for the unique creation they are, this praises God, but also makes the other person feel welcome and at home. Today, try to affirm everyone you meet – even those with whom you struggle.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I celebrate the unique way you are reflected in every person, O God.

**Tuesday 03 May 2016**

**Reading:** Psalm 93

**Reflection:** On Thursday we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus – which is a moment of glory and of amazing hospitality. As today's Psalm proclaims, the Ascension reveals Jesus as monarch over the whole world. Also, as the logical outworking of the resurrection of Jesus, the Ascension proclaims that God's Reign stands firm and cannot be shaken. Not even the floods – be they literal floodwaters, or the floods of imperial might – are capable of destroying the Reign of God. God's Reign remains strong and holy forever.

The good news in recognising how secure God's Reign is, is that we are invited to participate in it. When Jesus ascended, he did so as a human being, in the flesh. This means that he has carried our humanity with him into the very nature of God! This may be a tough thought to get your mind around, but I urge you to think about it until you get it. It's the ultimate act of hospitality – God making the divine nature and our human nature one. This is kind of like what happens when two people unite themselves in love and become "one flesh" – but on a much higher level. And, when we have become one with God, we know we are secure, because God's Reign is forever firm.

How can you experience a bit of this union with God for yourself today?

**Practice for Today:** Union with God is not something we can experience by thinking about it, or talking about it. It arises from a willingness to allow God's Spirit to move in the deepest parts of our lives. It's like a love affair with God that fills our thoughts, but goes beyond thinking into simple, but deep connection. When we invoke God's Spirit to fill us, we are asking for such an experience of union with God. Make today a day of such invocation.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Fill me, Holy Spirit, and unite my whole being with God.

**Wednesday 04 May 2016**

**Reading:** 2 Chronicles 34:20-33

**Reflection:** Josiah was one of the best kings of God's people. He took the throne when he was just a boy after decades of rule by the evil kings before him, but he quickly went about setting things straight. Today we read about the time when the book of law, which

had been lost during the years of apostasy, was discovered by one of the priests. It was brought to Josiah who immediately realised how seriously the people had strayed. And so, he called the people together, read the law to them and made a commitment to stay faithful to it for the rest of his life, which he did. There was no question in Josiah's mind, it seems, that God would accept God's people back. He had strong faith in God's grace and forgiveness.

However, both the law, and the word of God, which was spoken to Josiah by a prophetess, was clear that there would be consequence for Israel's unfaithfulness. In a time when all things, good and bad, were considered to be the intentional acts of God, these words of judgement were framed in the language of punishment. But, when we read how the history of Israel unfolded, we can see that what happened was simply the consequence of their unwise and evil choices. Nevertheless, throughout the unfaithfulness of God's people, God remained committed to them, and was always ready to forgive them and welcome them back – as happened with Josiah.

Where are you tempted to make choices that could lead to destructive consequences? What new commitments do you need to make to God today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the reasons we can practice confession with the certainty that we will be healed and restored is that Jesus revealed God as a forgiving and welcoming parent. If we refuse to deal with our "stuff", though, we cannot be healed – which was the case with so many of Israel's evil kings. Today, whenever you become aware of your brokenness at work, offer a prayer of confession and receive God's forgiveness and healing.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** When I am tempted to stray from your good way, O God, challenge me and draw me back to you.

#### **Thursday 05 May 2016**

**Reading:** Luke 24:44-53

**Reflection:** Today we remember and celebrate the Ascension of Christ. This is both a glorious moment in the Gospel narrative, and a tough account for us to interpret and apply. One thing is certain – we must not make the mistake of using this account to justify a belief

that heaven is "up there" in some far off distance place above us. At the time the Gospels were written, this is how the universe was viewed, but we have gained a lot of knowledge about the universe – and a lot of good thinking about heaven – since then.

So, what does the Ascension mean for us today? Three thoughts may be helpful as we seek to live out our faith in our daily routine. Firstly, the Ascension proclaims that Christ really is the monarch of the universe, and that God's Reign is undefeated by the forces of human empire, evil and violence. This is the moment when, in the image of the prophet Daniel, Christ returns to the heavenly throne room and is honoured as the victorious servant of God. Secondly, the Ascension reminds us that Jesus is not just a person, limited by a body and by local geography. Rather, the man, Jesus, is now the Christ who fills the entire universe, and who is available and at work in every moment and place. Finally, this moment of Ascension is the preparation for Pentecost – the experience of God's Spirit (God's presence and power) filling human beings so that we can become a community that reveals Christ to the world.

Today, celebrate Christ's presence and the Spirit's power in your own life as you remember the Ascension.

**Practice for Today:** When we are faced with events of such mystery and awe as the Ascension, it is best not to get too caught up in trying to provide rational explanations. It's not that it is wrong to do so – certainly such attempts to understand have their place – but, our first response should be praise and wonder. Today, allow the mystery of Ascension to lead you into praise of Jesus.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Risen and Ascended Christ, I praise and honour you as the one who fills the universe with God's loving presence.

#### **Friday 06 May 2016**

**Reading:** Exodus 33:12-17

**Reflection:** It's a little unfortunate that the reading that is set for today ends at verse 17. In the verses that follow Moses boldly asks God to show him God's glory, and God does so, after hiding him in a cleft in a rock, and passing by him. The glory that Moses sees (only

in partial form – the account says he sees only God's back) is revealed in sight and in words of grace and love that God proclaims. Today's reading, though, shows us the preparation for this amazing moment. It's a moving account of Moses' humility and conscious dependence on God. Recognising that God is calling the people to go on a journey to the Promised Land, Moses acknowledges that they will need God's presence and guidance. Even after God promises to be with the people, Moses presses God even further, asking for a strong assurance from God. Graciously God gives him what he asks.

After last Sunday's emphasis on God's hospitality, this reading is a touching account of how God has always been available and welcoming to women and men. This Sunday, as we read of Jesus prayer for the community of faith that he has established, we see him asking God to make the disciples one with each other and with God in order to bring God's message of grace and love to the world. It is this union with God, and the love for one another that results, that shows us how to be God's people. Both Moses and Jesus knew this and prayed accordingly.

How have you experienced God's presence and guidance in your life? How has God's hospitality helped you to find connection with others?

**Practice for Today:** Both Moses and Jesus were committed pray-ers. They both spent significant amounts of time pleading with God and boldly asking God for God's presence and guidance. If we seek to enjoy God's hospitality and become people of love and grace, we will need all the help we can get. We will need God's presence and power to fill us. Today, follow the example of Jesus and Moses and boldly prayer for God's presence to fill your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** God of grace and love, fill me and empower me today, I pray.

**Saturday 07 May 2016**

**Reading:** Psalm 97

**Reflection:** Tomorrow is both the last Sunday of the Easter Season and a continuation of the Ascension celebration. Whether the focus

in your church is on the Ascension or on Jesus' prayer for his disciples, both themes remind us that Christ is the one who reigns over the universe and who holds all things together.

Today's Psalm is a song of celebration for God's sovereignty and glory. The images that are used speak of great power (fire, lightning, mountains melting like wax) and great love (God's justice makes God's people glad, God protects the lives of God's people and brings them joy). God's justice and God's love, God's power and God's grace, are not opposites. They are the same, and they define each other. When we speak of God's Reign, we must always remember this. If we start to believe that God's love is unjust, or that God's justice is unloving, we need to reflect more deeply until we see the connection again. When we begin to see God's power as different from God's grace, we must pause and remember that they are the same. The glory of God is described in the poetry of power and dramatic forces of nature, but it is experienced in the gentleness of love and in the call to justice for all people.

Today, as you celebrate God's glory, open yourself to experience that glory in God's loving presence.

**Practice for Today:** If this Psalm is to be believed, God's glory is reflected in all of creation – including other people. Today, as you go through your tasks, try to keep your heart and mind open to recognise God's glory, and to experience and share God's love.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Your glory and your Reign surround and embrace me, O God, and I thank you.

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