

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
15 - 21 May 2016

Thought for the Week:

The Pentecost celebration is a pivotal moment, both in the Bible and in the Church Calendar. It is so filled with meaning and symbolism that it can take years to unpack its meaning. There is the gift of the Spirit, which empowers God's people to live the Jesus way and witness to the resurrection life he brings. There is the reversal of the curse of Babel – where human arrogance created division and confusion in the communication of people, Pentecost now gives the ability to communicate across the barriers of language, race and culture. There is the birth of the Church, the Christian community founded on the values and mission of Jesus. There is the symbol of harvest (Pentecost was originally a harvest festival) in which women and men are brought into a saving relationship with God. And there is the enigmatic reference (in Peter's sermon) to Joel's "Day of the Lord" which promised a time when God's justice and mercy would prevail and God's Reign would be established on the earth.

But, all of these amazing meanings are empty if they don't have an impact on our lives today. Here is where the good news of Pentecost can be found. We are the recipients of God's Spirit as much as the first disciples. We can enjoy the deep human connection that God brings, if we will allow the Spirit to lead us beyond our dividedness. We can be part of the community of faith in which we can belong, love and be loved. We can be part of God's harvest, helping in our own small way to lead others into God's life, and we can experience what it means to live in God's Reign as we embrace justice and mercy in our daily lives. The Pentecost experience can be ours today, if we will only open ourselves to God's Spirit and allow the Spirit to blow us where the Spirit wills (as Jesus says in John 3).

This week we will seek to open our hearts and lives to the Spirit of Pentecost and enter more deeply into the life of God as a result.

Pentecost Sunday 15 May 2016

Reading: John 14:8-17, 25-27

Reflection: The usual Pentecost reading is from Acts 2. I encourage you to read that as well today, but for now, our focus is on Jesus' words of preparation to his disciples. These words form part of the long Last Supper discourse in John's Gospel, which runs from Chapter 13 to Chapter 17. This is Jesus' last teaching opportunity before his death, and he seeks to prepare his disciples both for what will come in the next few hours, and what will lie beyond that.

There are three main messages Jesus is trying to communicate in today's reading. The first is that Jesus is one with God. When the disciples look at Jesus, they are seeing God. If our view of God contradicts, in any way, what we see in Jesus, we have the wrong idea about God. Secondly, Jesus encourages the disciples that they will be capable of doing the work he has called them to even when he is no longer with them, because he will still be working with them, giving them whatever they ask for. Finally, Jesus promises them the power of the Holy Spirit who will teach them, give them peace and will never leave them.

As we seek to follow Jesus, we need the same reassurances. We need to remember that Jesus reveals the truth about God to us. We need to know that God believes in us, and we are capable of doing what God has called us to. And we need to know that God's Spirit is with us and within us, guiding and empowering us every moment.

How can you receive these three truths into your life today?

Practice for Today: Whenever we need to go deeper into our experience and understanding of God, the practice of praise can help us. When we express our praise, we focus on God's nature and purpose, and we are changed. Praise opens us to God's Spirit, and reminds us of the God we serve and love. Today, allow praise to take you into a deeper connection with God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: O God you have revealed yourself to me and invited me into your life, and I praise you.

Monday 16 May 2016

Reading: Psalm 48

Reflection: Today's Psalm celebrates God's Reign, and Jerusalem as the place of God's enthronement. The song begins by praising God's greatness and God's "holy mountain" (which is a reference to the Temple Mount). Then it describes an attack on the city and God's victory over God's enemies, which results in the adoration of God's people. Finally, there is an invitation for people to walk around and inspect the city and see how it reveals what God is like. This Psalm is connected with the two Psalms before it, and may have been used during the three great pilgrimage feasts of Israel, of which Pentecost was one.

One the day of Pentecost, God's dwelling was revealed to be not a city, or even a Temple, but a people. Those who have been filled with God's Spirit, and who live according to the values and purposes of God's Reign, are now the Temple of God, and their hearts are God's throne. Although this people has been attacked many times through the centuries, it remains strong and nurtured by God. It is a people who give their lives in adoration of God, and who reveal God to the world.

Read the Psalm again and apply these words to the Church. How does this make you feel about being part of this community in which God lives and through which God is revealed to the world?

Practice for Today: Following Jesus is never a solitary endeavour. It is always a journey that is shared with other pilgrims. It is important to remember this, because when the attacks come – as they will in various forms – we need others to support, strengthen, pray for, and heal us. Today, in some small way, reaffirm your commitment to God's people.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that you have made me a part of the people who are your dwelling.

Tuesday 17 May 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 11:14-25

Reflection: It seems that it was convenient for the people who had remained behind in Israel during the exile to believe that the exiles

were abandoned by God. They wanted to use this as an excuse to claim the land of the exiles for themselves. Sometimes traumatic events can bring out the best in us, but sometimes – like here – suffering brings out our worst. But, God spoke to the exiles and made it clear that they had not been abandoned. Rather, God promised to restore them and to give them a new heart and spirit. The truth is that if we are to live in God's way, we need God's resources. It does not come naturally to live with generosity, justice, peace and love. But, if we will allow God to give us God's heart and Spirit, we will find that we have all the resources we need to live the Jesus way.

The Pentecost celebration is all about the gift of God's Spirit coming to God's people so that they could be witnesses to Christ and his mission, and have the power to live out the love of Jesus. This works in at least two ways. On the one hand, God's Spirit convicts us of our "stony, stubborn hearts" – as with the people in Jerusalem in Ezekiel's vision. This is so that what is broken can be healed. On the other hand, the Spirit gives us "tender, responsive hearts" that enable us to reflect the grace and love of Jesus in every moment of our lives.

Where do you need a "stony" heart to be replaced by a "tender" one in your life?

Practice for Today: Until we are willing to acknowledge the parts of us that are "stony" and "stubborn" we cannot change, and we will keep bringing pain on ourselves and those around us. But, when we are willing to confess, and invite God's Spirit to heal us, our hearts can be changed. Today, allow the discipline of confession to soften and heal your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Holy Spirit, wherever my heart is stony, please make it tender.

Wednesday 18 May 2016

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Reflection: It may seem strange to be reading a passage about Jesus' birth at this time of the year. But, the account of Mary's conception makes it clear that God's Spirit was at the heart of this

new thing that God was doing. Whenever we see God at work in creation or in bringing a new reality into being, we see God's Spirit at work. The Spirit is always giving birth to new life – even when it seems impossible.

The promise that the angel speaks to Mary is profound. This child is not just any baby, but will receive the throne of David and will rule over Jacob's house. At a time when Israel was ruled by the mighty Roman Empire, such a statement was subversive and dangerous. But, the new kingdom that God's Spirit was birthing was completely different from any human empire, and impossible for any empire to stop.

The Pentecost promise is very similar to that given to Mary – except that it applies to all of us. We too are to be "overshadowed" by God's Spirit and are to give birth to Christ in our own hearts and lives. We too are to be the parents of God's Reign in our small corner of the world. And, like Mary, all we need to do to experience this is to respond, "Let it be with me just as you have said".

How can you open your heart a little more to God's creative Spirit today?

Practice for Today: Although God's Spirit is always present with us and at work in us, we need to be reminded of this again and again. That's why one of the oldest prayers of the Church is an invocation: "Come, Holy Spirit". When we pray this prayer, we open ourselves to the Spirit's creative power, and we become participants in the Spirit's work in our world. Why not pray this prayer throughout today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit.

Thursday 19 May 2016

Reading: Ephesians 1:17-19

Reflection: This weekend we celebrate Trinity Sunday. This is the one day in the year where the focus is on a doctrine – which is particularly significant when we consider that the word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible. However, the New Testament consistently refers to God in Trinitarian terms. Today's reading is one example. There are a number of specific gifts that Paul prays

for in this passage – the ability to know God, to see God's call, to enjoy being God's inheritance and to experience God's power. This is the work of "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" and comes about through the "spirit of wisdom and revelation". The entire Godhead is involved in the work of drawing us into the depths of God's love and grace!

One thing stands out very strongly in this passage – God desires to give us all the strength we need for a life of following Jesus. To live the Jesus way, we need to be constantly growing in our understanding of God. We need to find hope in a sense of call and purpose, we need to rest in God's enjoyment of us as God's inheritance. Finally, we need a power beyond ourselves to navigate the challenges of this world. All of this and more God makes available to us, if we will just receive it.

How can you open yourself to these gifts today?

Practice for Today: So often we spend time praying for things that we have already received. We just haven't recognised that these things are ours already. This is where thanksgiving is such a helpful practice. It reminds us of what we have, and enables us to make it a conscious part of our lives. This is especially true with God's gifts of wisdom, love and strength. Today, spend time giving thanks for all the gifts God has given you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For showing yourself to me, and for all the hope, joy and power you give, I give thanks, O God.

Friday 20 May 2016

Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

Reflection: So many of Paul's letters are filled with words of simple common sense. Even though he was in prison, the apostle continues to encourage the believers to live lives that reflect the grace and love of Christ. His advice for doing this is clear and practical – be patient, humble and gentle; make allowances for one another; make your connections with each other your priority and strive for peace. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone lived this way!

Yet, these simple guidelines are rooted in the nature of God. These are not just good ideas. They are reflections of the humility, gentleness, peace and love that exist within the Trinity. As the three persons of the Godhead are one, so are we called to be one. When we live in unity, we experience a deep connection not just with each other, but with God – because God is over all and lives in and through all (Vs. 6).

It seems impossible that we would choose hostility and greed, violence and rejection over the kind of life Jesus and Paul taught, and yet this is what human beings have done across the world and through the centuries. What is even more surprising is that such behaviour has often been perpetrated in Christ's name, using faith as an excuse to judge, harm and dehumanise others. As simple as Paul's instructions are, they are more difficult to apply, it seems, than it may appear.

Where do you need to embrace these practices and live a life that is worthy of Jesus?

Practice for Today: It's very hard to hurt, exclude or judge someone when you are praying for them. Firstly, being on our knees (literally or figuratively) always keeps us humble, and secondly, when we pray for another, we see them as people who are loved by God. Today, make time to pray for those whom you most struggle to love.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For those with whom I disagree, and who are different from me, I pray, O God.

Saturday 21 May 2016

Reading: Psalm 8

Reflection: One of the powerful themes that will be celebrated in tomorrow's Trinity Sunday services is that God is a loving community. What makes this so exciting is that loving communities always seek to spread the love as widely as possible. This is no less true of the Godhead. Today's Psalm reflects on the way God's love extends into the whole of creation. It's not just that God is glorious and majestic, as the first verses of the song proclaim. It's also that God draws all of creation into God's presence and love – children,

women and men, and even animals, birds and fish. The tremendous grace that is reflected here is that God has chosen to include human beings in God's care for the earth. The authority which this Psalm mentions is not about the earth being a storehouse which we can plunder at will. It's about us being God's representatives, allowing God's nurture, creativity and love to flow into the universe through us. What a privilege to be invited to share in God's mission in this way – to be included in the divine community of the Trinity in this way!

How can you live as God's representative today, spreading the loving community of God a bit wider in your small corner of the world?

Practice for Today: When we begin to understand and embrace God's loving community, we can't help but go out into the world with an attitude of welcome. Today, try to be welcoming and open with everyone – and every creature – you encounter.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May the loving community that is your nature, O God, flow through me into the world.

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