

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

05 - 11 March 2017

Thought for the Week:

The first week of Lent always leads us to contemplate the temptations of Jesus. We do this, firstly, to learn more about who Jesus was, and the kind of Messiah he chose to be. Then, secondly, we allow Jesus' victory over temptation to inspire and strengthen us to face our own temptations. It's important to realise that these were genuine temptations for Jesus. We may think that, since Jesus was God, there was never any chance that he would fail, but this denies his true humanity. Jesus could well have fallen and chosen to be a self-serving, power-hungry leader, like others in his (and our) world. But, he chose a different way – the way of service, sacrifice and simplicity. He chose to offer his life for the sake of others.

Jesus' temptations were not unique. He faced essentially the same enticements that we all do. It was only the specific way in which these temptations came to Jesus that were unique. This means that we can learn from how he overcame evil. It is a gift that we have this record of Jesus' struggle with evil, and it is a testimony to his openness and honesty that he would share this experience with others (he must have done, or this story would never have been known by the Gospel writers). Jesus' willingness to face the potential for darkness within himself is both a challenge and encouragement to us, if we will allow it to each us.

This week we explore how to overcome the potential for darkness within us.

Sunday 05 March 2017

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Reflection: Essentially Jesus' temptations were all about the kind of Messiah he would choose to be. He was tempted to use his power and position for his own personal pleasure, he was tempted to use his power to avoid suffering and win people over through force, and he was tempted to accumulate wealth and glory for himself, rather

than to follow God's way of sacrifice and suffering. Yet, in each temptation he overcame by choosing to live with humility and love for the sake of others, rather than for his own aggrandisement. The way Jesus handled these temptations tells us a lot about who Jesus is – and isn't – and also reveals a lot about the nature of God.

Notice that nothing Jesus was tempted to do was evil in itself. Eating to satisfy hunger is a natural human need, and Jesus was called to feed God's people, as he did at the feeding of the five thousand. Jumping off the Temple, while it may be foolish, is not really evil as such, and Jesus was called to defy death through divine power, as he did at the resurrection. The desire to win the nations was at the heart of Jesus' mission, and he knew that, as God's Son, he enjoyed all the riches of the Godhead. Yet, as the final temptation shows, the timing and motivation of these temptations were what counted. If Jesus had yielded to even one of them, he would have turned his allegiance from God to the power of evil, and he would have become powerless to save anyone. He could be a Messiah on his own terms, or on God's terms – and, thankfully, he chose the latter!

Our temptations are often the same. It is our light, not our darkness, that tempts us. What we are called to do, and what we are good at – these are the places where our motivation and character are tested, and where arrogance, self-centredness, and power games are most likely to call to us. How are you tempted away from allegiance to God today? How can you overcome those temptations?

Practice for Today: It is easy to see how Jesus overcame evil – he quoted Scripture. He had immersed himself in God's ways and values to such an extent that he could easily recognise these deceptions when they came. Today, make time to prepare yourself for temptation by immersing yourself in the Bible.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I read your word, O God, fill my heart and life with a vision of your values and purposes.

Monday 06 March 2017

Reading: Hebrews 2:10-18

Reflection: What an amazing Saviour Jesus is! Today's reading highlights two wonderful gifts Jesus gives us: He welcomes us as his brothers and sisters, and he willingly stepped into our flesh and

experience to bring us forgiveness and salvation. In order to lead us and heal us, Jesus had to suffer and die, and he did so, graciously and selflessly, in order to break the power of evil in our lives. This is cause for tremendous celebration!

We may be tempted to think that since Jesus has done so much, we have nothing to do but gratefully receive God's gift of salvation. In one sense this is true – our right relationship with God, and our entry into God's abundant, eternal life, are pure gift and we can do nothing to earn them. But, in another sense, nothing could be further from the truth. We are each called to confront and overcome whatever evil we may face in our own lives. Jesus doesn't do this for us. He has given us an example of how to overcome evil, and he has given us everything we need to be victorious – the power of God's Spirit, the wisdom of the Scriptures, the support of our brothers and sisters in faith – but, we have to overcome our own demons. And we need to remember that evil is only as strong as we allow it to be. If we refuse to give evil a foothold in our lives, it cannot grow and thrive.

How can you remember Jesus' gifts of love and salvation, and embrace the tools he gives for overcoming evil in your life today?

Practice for Today: Of all the gifts we have received that give us victory over evil, the greatest is God's own presence and power that come to us through the Holy Spirit. In order to make use of this gift, we need only remember the Spirit's presence in our lives, and constantly invite the Spirit to work in and through us. Today, invite the Spirit to strengthen and help you in every moment.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Fill me with your presence and power, Holy Spirit, so that I may overcome whatever evil I may face.

Tuesday 07 March 2017

Reading: Genesis 4:1-16

Reflection: The story of Cain and Abel was written to explore much deeper truths than just historical facts. Once we have accepted this, we can open our hearts to the challenge of this strange story.

Two important truths stand out with regard to this week's theme. The first is that right from the earliest chapters of the Bible we see God choosing the younger brother over the elder. In the times when this

account was written, eldest sons were considered more important than their younger siblings, but throughout the Old Testament, we see God choosing the younger (least) brother to fulfill God's mission. This reveals that it is not our status or ability that God needs – just our willingness. But, Cain could not handle God's choice of his younger brother, and considered this a rejection by God. His jealousy and anger drove him to murder, which brought the consequences of isolation, loneliness, and lack of security. This is the second truth – and it's a pattern with which we can all identify.

We are all tempted to believe that we can earn God's approval through what we achieve. We all know the frustration when others, whom we consider less worthy, enjoy "blessings" we don't. And we all know the temptation to attack, undermine, judge, or dismiss others because of our jealousy, anger, and shame. We may not resort to murder, but the destructive consequences when we give in to these feelings are much the same – isolation, loneliness, and a lack of security because our relationships have broken down. The good news is that, in Christ, we have the promise of God's forgiveness, and the capacity to choose differently.

How can you overcome the temptations of jealousy, anger, and shame today, and work to keep your relationships strong?

Practice for Today: If Cain had been willing to face the darkness in his heart, the outcome of this story would have been very different. But, in his refusal to confess and repent change he brought destruction on his brother and on himself. Confession is the antidote to the disease of denial and destruction. Today allow confession and repentance to set you free from your darkness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I confess the darkness in my heart, O God, so you set me free and help me to change.

Wednesday 08 March 2017

Reading: Psalm 32

Reflection: When it comes down to it, we are not able to overcome the darkness within us. We do not have the capacity to live the way we know we should. If we live in denial, hiding from our sinfulness and pretending that we're fine as we are, we leave ourselves open for our worst selves to control and direct us. But, when we

acknowledge that we need a strength beyond us and we are willing to do the work of transformation, then God's Spirit is able to work within us, change us, and lead us to live as our best selves.

This is the spirit of today's Psalm. The writer rejoices in God's forgiveness because he has experienced it first hand. But, it was not his first response to his sin. Instead, he tried to hide it and pretend that there was nothing to confess. The consequence of this denial was a physical and emotional turmoil that took its toll on his health and wellbeing. But, when he finally relented and admitted his brokenness, healing came, and he found life and freedom in God's loving grace. This is why he sings that God is a hiding place where he is protected and where songs of deliverance and victory are the norm. This is the free gift of God's grace that is available to all of us.

What darkness do you need to confess today? And how can you allow God's Spirit to lead you to live as your best self?

Practice for Today: In order to be able to confess and find the freedom God offers, we need to do the work of self-examination. If we are unwilling to see what's really inside us, it will be very difficult to genuinely repent. Today, spend some time in stillness and self-examination as you open your life to God's searching gaze.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I examine my heart before you, O God, release me from any darkness I may find there.

Thursday 09 March 2017

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Reflection: Faith is contagious! When we are close to those who have a strong and mature faith, it inevitably "rubs off" on us. Paul, in this letter to Timothy, reflects on two ways that the young man's faith has been nurtured. Firstly, Paul speaks about his relationship with Timothy and how much joy they have found in each other. It's touching to see the care that this seasoned apostle showed toward this young leader in the church. But, then Paul celebrates the family of faith from which Timothy comes. He has a heritage of faithful women in his life, and their influence has been profound. Timothy was a fortunate young man to have such caring and positive examples of faith, both men and women, to teach and nurture him.

But, Paul stresses that Timothy also has work to do in growing his own faith. He is to "fan into flame" the spiritual gifts of God, and to remember the power, love and self-discipline that God gives us through God's Spirit.

We all have the same blessings that Timothy enjoyed. We may not have had family members who were strong in faith, but, if we remain connected to the community of faith, we have lots of brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers in the faith to teach us and nurture us. We have also all received spiritual gifts from God's Spirit, and we can all fan the flames of God's Spirit within us. As we do this, not only do we overcome the darkness within us, but we also begin to radiate the light of God's glory to the world around us.

How can you nurture your relationships with those in the family of faith who inspire and strengthen you?

Practice for Today: In order to enjoy the gifts of community, we need to remain connected to a community. This means that we need to gather with our sisters and brothers in faith more often than just at church services on Sunday. This is why small groups are such a gift. Today, take some time to attend a small group, or, if you can't do that, try to set up an informal gathering of some of your companions in the faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I gather with my sisters and brothers in faith, Jesus, so my faith grows strong and mature.

Friday 10 March 2017

Reading: Romans 3:21-31

Reflection: Jesus' way is not a meritocracy. God does not hand out rewards to those who are good and curses to those who are bad. This is the clear message of today's reading from Romans. We have all sinned, so if anything depended on our goodness, we would all be doomed. There is not a single person who has ever, or could ever, do enough to deserve God's favour. As Richard Rohr says, God loves us not because we are good, but because God is good. And it is because God is good that God made a way for us to be in right relationship with God and with one another that does not depend on law, but on love. Jesus demonstrated this new way of relating when he willingly gave his life instead of retaliating against

our evil, and when he spoke forgiveness over his executioners. But, more than that, by giving us his life through the Holy Spirit, Jesus has made it possible for us to live this new way of love as well. This is a gift of pure and amazing grace.

We make a mistake, though, if we think that this gift of grace is a purely individual thing, or if we think it invites us to live however we please with no concern for consequences. We may not be able to earn grace, but if we receive God's gift of grace we will definitely be changed. We will discover that we are called into community with others who have also received God's grace, and we are to share grace with them - even when they hurt or offend us. We will also discover that God's grace changes our hearts and we begin striving to live in a way that brings justice, grace, love, peace and joy to others. This is why Paul says that it is only when we have faith that we truly fulfil the law. God's gracious invitation frees us from legalistic religion, but it captures us with a new way of living that seeks to serve and love all others indiscriminately.

How can you embrace God's gracious gift today? And how can it change your heart so you live and love a little more like Jesus?

Practice for Today: When we think of all that God has done and made possible for us in Jesus, there is really only one appropriate response - thanksgiving. And, as we give thanks, we dive deeper into God's grace and love, and we are changed a little more to be like Jesus. Give thanks today for God's grace in Christ.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your amazing grace, and the power to live as a gracious, loving person, I thank you, O God.

Saturday 11 March 2017

Reading: Luke 7:1-10

Reflection: It would have been shocking, and a little bit offensive, for the Jewish followers of Jesus to hear him praise a Gentile as having shown the most remarkable faith of anyone he had met. But, that was how Jesus responded to the faith of this Roman Centurion. When this man sent his messengers to Jesus, he wasn't just saying that he believed Jesus could heal his servant. He was also showing that he understood who Jesus was, and the divine authority that he had been given. For him the comparison with his own situation, as

an officer who had authority over others because of the rank he had received from his superiors, was obvious. Jesus had clearly, in his mind, received authority from God, and so any other forces that may be at work in the world would have to obey him - including those that brought sickness on people. This was a profound proclamation of faith in Jesus' divine nature and calling.

When Jesus praised this man's faith, he was not just speaking about this message, though. Yes, in that moment the Centurion revealed his faith in the person and power of Jesus. But, he had clearly already been living as a person of deep faith. He may not have known the name of Jesus for long before this event, but he had certainly lived the values of Jesus for a long time. He had won the respect of the Jewish leaders - which was no small feat for a Roman occupier - and he had even built them a place of worship. He was also deeply humble, and very aware that he had nothing in himself that made him worthy of special treatment by Jesus - in spite of the fact that the Jewish leaders believed he deserved it. In his character and actions this man reflected the way of Jesus long before Jesus had ever impacted his life. This faith was as important to Jesus as the faith in Jesus' healing ability.

How can your life reflect your faith in Jesus' way of love and service a little more today?

Practice for Today: One of the things that stands out in this story is how easily the Centurion expressed his admiration of Jesus. He was unconcerned for his own pride or reputation. He simply gave himself to praise and let Jesus know how much he respected Jesus' divine authority. Faith always expresses itself in praise like this - both as an automatic result of what we believe about God, and as way to open ourselves to a deeper encounter with God that deepens our faith still further. Today, allow your praises to express and deepen your faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you Jesus, for in you we see God's character and divine authority at work.

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