

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
12 – 18 March 2017

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

It is easy to reduce faith to a system of ideas that we simply have to accept. It is easy to make salvation nothing more than praying the right prayer and signing the right card. But, if we do this, we rob ourselves of the true power and value of faith. A faith that is simply a set of ideas does not change our very lives and give us a new way of seeing or a God's-Reign way of being. The faith that leads to new birth, which Jesus offered to Nicodemus, is a transforming encounter with a God who leads us into a whole new world – the world of God's Reign, where children are the leaders, the meek inherit the earth, and the poor, the mourners and the peace makers are the recipients of God's presence and grace.

Once we have embraced this faith, we cannot help but begin to live this new life in such a way that it makes a difference in our families, our places of work and leisure, our communities and our churches. Once we have been born anew, we find ourselves recognising Christ in those we would normally shun, and we begin to care about issues that we would normally ignore. It is not our obedience that leads us to life, but our faith. However, faith that does not change who we are and how we live, is not faith at all. Ultimately believing does not happen in our heads alone, but in our whole being, and in lives that, in small but significant ways, touch the least with grace and compassion, and seek to make the world a more hopeful, celebratory and gracious place.

This week we explore this radical, life-giving faith.

### **Sunday 12 March 2017**

**Reading:** John 3:1-17

**Reflection:** Nicodemus, like the crowds Jesus had encountered in the temple, had become fascinated by Jesus' miracles. The questions this had raised had begun to trouble him and so he came to Jesus at night when no one would know he had been consulting

this disturbing preacher. But, when Nicodemus made reference to Jesus' miracles, Jesus dismissed them and went right to the heart – the new birth which enables us to enter God's Reign. In all the Gospels God's Reign refers not to life after death, but to a whole new reality, a whole new world based on God's love and justice. What Jesus was saying is that, in order to grasp God's reality, we need to release what we know of the world and how it works to such an extent that we become like new born babies – entering a whole new world, with everything to learn and experience.

But, then Jesus spoke about God's love that brings eternal life to all who believe. Again, this is less about what happens after death and more about how we see the world and live in it here and now. Eternal life refers to the life of the new age when the Messiah has established God's Reign, and believing is about allowing our entire selves to be captured by the new life. Like the snakes in the wilderness which came as a consequence of Israel's sin, so Jesus will be executed by the evil in human hearts, but as he is lifted up he reveals a new way of being – the way of love, forgiveness, grace, and peace – and he invites us into this new life.

This is the essence of faith – being born again into a whole new way of living. How can you grow in this kind of faith a little more today?

**Practice for Today:** Jesus told Nicodemus that it was God's Spirit that would need to enable this new birth to happen. We don't have the capacity to make this transformation happen in ourselves. We can only open ourselves to the Spirit who works within us. Today, allow your prayers of invocation to open you to the Spirit's transforming work in your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Come, Holy Spirit, and let me be born again – over and over – into the image of Christ.

### **Monday 13 March 2017**

**Reading:** Numbers 21:4-9

**Reflection:** What is so interesting about the complaint of the Israelites in today's reading is that none of them had actually experienced Egypt. This was near the end of their wilderness wanderings, in which the entire generation that had refused to enter the Promised Land had died. So, this was a completely new

generation with no memory or experience of living in Egypt. Yet, so effective had their parents nurtured a spirit of unbelief that they still harkened back to an Egypt they had never known. How easily the slavery and suffering had been forgotten!

The curse of snakes may seem harsh, but the Hebrew word here is strange. We do not know exactly what these snakes were. The word can mean either “fiery” or “winged” snakes. The idea of winged snakes may be a reference back to the winged snake goddess of Egypt, meaning that the very thing that was destroying the people was their desire for Egypt and its gods, and their refusal to place their trust wholly in God. Once again, what initially looks like a harsh divine judgment turns out to be simply the consequence of the people’s actions. And their healing came through looking at a bronze snake – looking at the very thing that was destroying them. What God reveals here is that, until we are willing to look at our evil honestly and consciously, we cannot be healed. But, if we will acknowledge what destroys us, we can overcome it.

What sinful or broken desires or attitudes are hurting you and others today? How can you find healing by honestly acknowledging it?

**Practice for Today:** The work of confession is not about living with an over developed sense of guilt and unhappiness. It is about acknowledging what harms us in order to be healed of it, so that we can live lives of freedom and joy. Faith means trusting God’s ways more than our own ways. It also means doing the honest work of confession to find healing when we do fall into broken ways. Today allow confession to heal and liberate you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I acknowledge my brokenness and sin, O God, please heal and liberate me.

## **Tuesday 14 March 2017**

**Reading:** Romans 4:6-13

**Reflection:** Circumcision was the physical sign that, for the Jewish nation, represented obedience to the whole law. They knew they were God’s chosen people because they were circumcised, and they carried in their bodies their commitment to obey God’s Law. So, you can imagine how shocking it would have been for faithful Jews to hear Christian preachers like Paul saying that God was more

concerned for faith than circumcision, and that God accepted and loved uncircumcised Gentiles just as much as God’s own people.

As we read these words we may question whether they have any relevance for us. We don’t hold circumcision in such high regard, and we don’t make our faith all about obeying the Law. Yet, we all fall, far too easily, into legalistic religion. We may begin to feel that unless we believe certain key doctrines, or refrain from certain actions, or worship in certain ways, we aren’t really accepted by God. Or, more likely, we may feel this about others who don’t believe, act, or worship as we do. But, if our relationship with God is based on such laws, we are all doomed. It is only when we realise that we, and everyone else, are accepted purely through God’s grace, which is enjoyed only through faith, that we can find the freedom of intimate relationship with God. And, only then can we release ourselves and others from the burden of the law.

As we seek to follow Christ, we don’t live in certain ways in order to gain God’s favour. We receive God’s favour freely, and this leads us to live in ways that share this grace and love with others. How can you live a little more by faith today?

**Practice for Today:** There is one attitude that always marks those who have recognised the extent of God’s grace and who have really received it in their hearts and lives – thanksgiving. When we experience the joy of God’s favour, we cannot help but give thanks, and as we give thanks, we open ourselves to experience more of God’s grace. Today, allow your thanksgiving to free you and to connect you more deeply with God’s grace and love.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I thank you, O God, for your undeserved grace that has welcomed me into your love.

## **Wednesday 15 March 2017**

**Reading:** John 7:53-8:11

**Reflection:** Today’s reading begins in a strange place – the end of the previous section. The reason for this is because this entire section is not found in some early manuscripts, and so there is some question about whether this was part of the original Gospel of John. Whether it was or not does not change the fact that this story is consistent with the character of Jesus as described in the rest of the

Gospel. Just before this story, the crowds had questioned whether Jesus was the Messiah or not. The religious leaders felt that if they could show that Jesus did not obey the law, they would silence this Messiah-talk. So, they brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, and reminded him that the law required her to be stoned. What they failed to say is that the law also required the man to be stoned, but he was strangely absent. If Jesus had allowed her to be stoned, he would have lost the support of the crowds. If he refused, he would have proved that he defied the law. But, of course, Jesus responded in a way that went to the heart of the law, and which ultimately liberated this woman.

When we make our religion about the law, we tend to create checklists that are relatively easy for us to follow, and then use those same lists to judge and condemn others, as the religious leaders did. But, when we recognise that even the law was really about what's going on in our hearts, we are freed from constant list keeping, and we begin to acknowledge that we are all equally in need of God's mercy. Then, as we receive God's grace for ourselves, we cannot help but extend that grace to others. Those who know their unworthiness are far quicker to make concessions for the unworthiness of others. Those who know that they have been forgiven much are much quicker to forgive.

Who needs you to release your condemnation today?

**Practice for Today:** It is unfortunate that, in the minds of so many people who do not attend a church, Christianity is viewed as a religion of hatred and judgement. It is amazing how, when we show grace and forgiveness, people are often pleasantly surprised. This should not be unusual, but should be the norm for followers of Jesus. Today, allow words of grace, blessing, and forgiveness to flow easily from your lips.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Since I know that I am not without sin, O God, I refuse to throw stones at others.

#### **Thursday 16 March 2017**

**Reading:** Colossians 1:15-23

**Reflection:** Today's reading is believed to be one of the earliest hymns of the Church. Although we no longer know what the music

would have sounded like, we can imagine that the first believers sang these words with joy and passion as they proclaimed Christ as the God who created, redeemed, and renewed all of creation. We have heard these words so often that their power can be lost, but it is truly awe-inspiring to realise that the one who gave life to the entire cosmos gave up his own life out of love for the created order.

Part of the amazing gift of restoration and life that Christ has given is that all of creation is reconciled to one another and to God. Jesus made peace between God and humanity, between people, and between human beings and the world. In Christ we not only receive life, but we learn to share it. This is a key feature of the Christian understanding of salvation. In fact, as followers of Jesus we believe that if we aren't sharing God's life, we haven't actually received it fully yet. It is only as we allow God to use us to share God's life and peace with others through us that we are able to fully experience these amazing gifts of God. Sharing does not diminish God's life. It multiplies it, and creates an overflowing stream of living water that touches anyone who comes near.

How can you share God's life with those around you today?

**Practice for Today:** The Christian practice of giving is a central feature of living the Jesus way, but it does not only relate to money. Giving includes the giving of our time to build strong, caring relationships. It includes the giving of our talents and abilities to serve and empower others. And it includes the giving of ourselves to connect more deeply with those around us. Today, look for every opportunity to share God's life through generous giving.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I share your life with those around me, O God, so your living water fills me more and more.

#### **Friday 17 March 2017**

**Reading:** Exodus 16:9-21

**Reflection:** God's gift of food in the wilderness was about much more than just the physical hunger of the Israelites. The people had been complaining because, in the wilderness, they had no food, and they began to doubt Moses' leadership. So, while they were hungry, they were also afraid. God's provision was both a gift of food and a gift of faith. The manna remained a mystery throughout the

wilderness journey (the name means “what is it?”), yet it fed the hunger of the people for decades. Each day the people would gather only what they needed for that day. When they tried to hoard a little for the future, it went off. This meant that every day was a call to trust. And every day, everyone had enough.

We have no way of knowing what the manna was, or what the detailed facts of this story are. Certainly we don't see manna falling from heaven to feed us today. Yet the call to faith remains. This does not mean that we can sit back and do nothing while we wait for God to drop what we need in our laps – even the Israelites had to gather each day. Nor does it mean that we must relegate this story to the past and rely only on our own abilities to sustain us. Faith is about recognising that, in Christ, God fills us with life, and guides us to live in ways that ensure that everyone in our communities have enough. Hoarding cannot sustain us, and fear will ultimately destroy us. But, God's ways of generosity and trust can teach us to find and share life and all that is needed for daily nourishment.

How can you learn to trust a little more today? And how you can be God's channel of provision for someone else?

**Practice for Today:** In the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray for our daily bread. It is a good thing to place our needs, and even our desires, before God. But, as we pray for ourselves, it is also good to remember that others also need their daily bread, and to ask God how we can help our neighbours from the provisions we enjoy. Allow your prayers to strengthen your faith and your generosity today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Give me today my daily bread, O God, and teach me to share it with those around me.

### **Saturday 18 March 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 95

**Reflection:** Today's Psalm offers so much for us to reflect on. It invites us to recognise God as our Creator, our Saviour, and the One who watches over us. It invites us to see ourselves as God's flock, the people who are under God's care, and who receive life from God. And it warns us to ensure that we don't allow our fear, our pride, or our self-centredness to harden our hearts. The Israelites, who were sustained and liberated by God, and who saw God doing

amazing things for them, refused to place their trust in God. Although the Psalmist describes God as making a vow to keep the people from God's rest, the truth is that it was their own fear that stopped them from entering the Promised Land and that forced them stay in the wilderness for longer than necessary. If they had simply trusted God's promise, they could have enjoyed the land of milk and honey decades earlier.

Like the Israelites, we may be tempted to doubt God's grace and love, or we may feel that we have to earn God's favour. While the Scriptures do not promise health, wealth and happiness, they do consistently remind us that God cares for us and sustains us, if we will just turn away from our self-protectiveness and open ourselves to God's values of justice, peace, grace, love and generosity. When we live with humility and deep connections with God and others, we always know that we will be cared for because we each become a channel of God's living water to each other. This does not just mean that we can be spiritually nurtured. When we live out the values of God's Reign, even our physical needs (not greeds) can be addressed as we share life together.

How can you celebrate God's love and care a little more today? And how can you help others to trust God a little more as well?

**Practice for Today:** When we practice praise, we automatically begin to trust God more because we see God's goodness and grace more clearly. This is especially true when we're going through tough times. Today, whether you are feeling fortunate or are struggling, allow your praises to connect you more deeply with God and to strengthen your faith.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you God for you are my Maker and my salvation.

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