

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

19 - 25 March 2017

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

The feeling of dryness, thirst for life, and emptiness of soul is an experience shared by every human being. We all go through times of emptiness and dryness when life feels difficult and without joy. We all know what it feels like to be hurt, rejected, or exhausted by life's demands. We all long for refreshment, for living water to flood our souls and quench our thirst for vibrant, meaningful life. This is why water is such a common and profound metaphor in the Bible. So many of the Old Testament stories of God's acts include water in some form. Jesus spoke of offering living water to those who would come to him, and the Holy Spirit is often likened to water. And, throughout the ages, in the worship of the Church, water has been included – especially in the sacrament of baptism.

As those who are called by the name of Christ, and who are filled with God's Spirit, we know a source of refreshment and strength that is always available to us, even if we don't always make use of it. God's Spirit lives within us and will empower and inspire us if we open our hearts and lives to the Spirit's influence. But, we are also called to be carriers of God's living water to those around us. When we learn to draw on the Spirit's strength, we grow increasingly able to rise above those things that drain us and empty us out. And then we can become an inspiring and empowering influence to others.

This week we explore God's invitation to dive into the living water of God's Spirit.

### **Sunday 19 March 2017**

**Reading:** John 4:5-42

**Reflection:** If anyone knew what it was like to be worn out by life, and rejected by neighbours, it was the Samaritan woman in today's reading. We do not know the reason for her dubious sexual history. But, we can be sure, since she came to the well at the one time when no one else was supposed to be there, that she did not have a

good relationship with her neighbours. With all of this rejection and pain, the encounter with Jesus must have felt quite threatening at first. But, this soon changed. Jesus promised her living water – a life-giving presence within her that would enable her to be healed and restored – and she received it as they spoke. It didn't take long before she had lost her fear and returned to her village to bring the neighbours, whom she had previously avoided, to meet Jesus. We can only imagine what a difference this must have made to her life from that moment on, but we know that the entire village came to faith in Jesus. This may have been the preparation for the Samaritan revival that is mentioned in the book of Acts.

While our histories may be different from this woman, we all need this living water, and we all long for Jesus' promise. And, for those of us who have found the faith to trust it, and have opened to the Spirit, we know the value of the gift that God gives us in Christ. But, this is not just a once-off thing. We need this living water daily, as much as we need the water that sustains our bodies. And so, each day, whether we experience joy or sorrow, we can open our lives anew to God's Spirit. But, around us are others who also need the living water, and we have a responsibility to share it with them. This doesn't mean we must preach at them. Rather, it means that we can simply accept and love them, as Jesus did with this woman, and through our welcome bring healing and refreshment to their hearts.

How can you drink deep of God's living water today? Who needs you to share this gift with them?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most healing and refreshing things we can offer those around us the simple gift of kindness. Once we know we have been accepted and filled by God's Spirit, we lose the need to protect ourselves, and we can welcome, respect, and be kind to our neighbours. Today, be a carrier of living water to everyone you meet by treating them with respect and kindness.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have welcomed me and filled me with your living water, O God, so I share your gift with others.

### **Monday 20 March 2017**

**Reading:** Genesis 24:1-27

**Reflection:** Today's reading is a touching story of Abraham's love

for his son, and for the family he had left behind when he answered God's call. It is also a story of a servant's faithful obedience to his master's wishes. But, most of all, it is a story of how faith can guide us to God's best life for us. The servant's devotion to Abraham, and his reliance on God to help him fulfil Abraham's wishes reveal a love and grace that are a challenging example for us as followers of Jesus. If only we could be so faithfully and wholeheartedly devoted to God's purposes, and to one another.

Once again, though, it is water that plays a significant role. In order to identify a woman who would be kind and gracious as a wife for his master's son, the servant uses the simple, daily act of drawing water as a guide. And Rebekah, in her kindness and compassion, fulfilled everything the servant could have hoped, as she gave both him and his pack animals the water they needed. The symbolism of this is clear - as the water revealed Rebekah's heart and identified her as the chosen wife, so the water of God's Spirit reveals our hearts, and guides us along life's journey. This is yet another gift of the living water God offers us.

How can you allow God's Spirit to lead you today? And how can you let God's Spirit empower you to be your kindest, most gracious self?

**Practice for Today:** In every encounter with others, and with every experience we may face throughout our lives, we need a wisdom and power that can guide us and help us to be our best selves. This is why Jesus teaches that we need the Spirit if we are to follow his way. As you go through today, try to keep a constant prayer of invocation on your lips, inviting the Spirit to fill and guide you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill me and guide me, so that I may live my best life.

## **Tuesday 21 March 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 81

**Reflection:** This poignant Psalm expresses the heart of a God who longs not just to love God's people, but to lead them to the best possible human life. The writer expresses God's call for God's people to connect deeply with God in worship, and then reminds them of God's love and salvation. This is followed by God's cry for the people to follow God's ways, and enjoy the goodness that would

result if they did. But, since they have turned away, God grieves, and dreams of how the people could enjoy God's life if only they would turn back.

The experiences that are described in this Psalm are common to all humanity. God still longs for intimacy with us, and God still wants to lead us into our best life, to flood our lives with living water. And, we still go our own way, and bring pain and destruction on others and on ourselves as a result. But, God's invitation for us to turn back, be healed, and to reconnect with God's life, remains. We have only to drink deep of that life-giving stream.

Where are you still choosing to go your own way? How can you turn back and drink deep of God's living water today?

**Practice for Today:** We all have times when we go our own way, and ignore God's life-giving ways. The first step to return to God is to acknowledge that we have strayed, and then to make a conscious decision to change, to repent, and follow God's instruction in the future. This is the work of confession. Today, whenever you recognise that you are going your own way, take a moment to confess it and to turn back to God. Then drink deep of God's living water again.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Whenever I go astray, O God, call me back, and fill me again with your living water.

## **Wednesday 22 March 2017**

**Reading:** Jeremiah 2:4-13

**Reflection:** Following on from yesterday's challenging Psalm, today we hear the prophet Jeremiah confronting the people's rebellion against God. God's concern is not with the fact that they have rejected God, but that, in doing so, they have hurt themselves. The final image of today's reading is both powerful and very, very sad: "They have abandoned me – the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!" It's as if, being offered a drink of the clearest, purest water, the people have chosen instead to drink mud of their own choosing. The pride and foolishness of such a choice is easy to see.

But, before we point fingers at the ancient Israelites, we need to

recognise that we often do the same thing. Although Jesus revealed that life is found in simplicity, service and sacrifice, we have chosen to embrace destructive values - self-centredness, materialism, the idolisation of pleasure, and the quest for personal power and security. Instead of opening our hearts and lives to God's living water, we have dug cracked cisterns for ourselves that can never quench our thirst for life. But, as with Israel, all is not lost. God remains faithful to us, and constantly seeks to fill our lives with living water. All we need to do is turn away from the things that never satisfy and drink deep of God's life again.

What "cracked cisterns" have you held on to in your life? How can you release them and turn back to God, the fountain of living water?

**Practice for Today:** When we focus on the "bright, shiny objects" of our world, it is easy to get captivated by their promise. But, too often, when we build our lives around the values of power, pleasure or possessions we find that they do not satisfy as they claimed they would. When we focus on God and allow our praises to fill our hearts and minds with a vision of God's grace and love, we soon discover a source of life that does not fail us. Today, allow your praises to realign your priorities and open your heart to God's life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for you are the fountain of living water.

#### **Thursday 23 March 2017**

**Reading:** Ephesians 4:25-32

**Reflection:** All the talk of living water this week may have felt a little abstract and disconnected from the practical details of our lives. It can sound good to speak of drinking deep of God's life, but in the daily struggle to keep relationships strong, and to make ends meet, it can be hard to know what this actually means. This is where the Bible is such a gift. As much as it uses poetic and symbolic language to describe the life of faith, it also employs the clearest and most basic terms to explain what a life flooded by living water looks like. Today's reading is such a passage, calling us to live the Jesus way in simple, practical acts of kindness, integrity, and creativity.

The main values that feature strongly in Paul's description of the Christian life are truth, kindness, mutual support, and gracious

forgiveness. Thieves and liars are called to live honestly, and to contribute to the well being of others, instead of hurting others in their quest for personal gain. The angry and abusive are called to gentleness and reconciliation, and are encouraged to support and help others, instead of cutting them down. And to all who seek to live God's way together, Paul offers the challenge to have tender and forgiving hearts. This is simple and practical, but if we all lived in this way, the world would overflow with living water – with joy, peace, friendship, equality, sufficiency, and goodness.

How can you put these practical guidelines in place in your own life today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most important shifts we can make in how we live our lives is to turn away from being self-centred to being other-centred. This does not mean that we ignore our own needs, but that, as we all seek the best for one another, all of us experience a greater sense of being cared for and provided for. When we consider the effects of our words and actions on others and live in the most welcoming and kind way, the entire world becomes safer and friendlier. Today, seek to welcome and serve others first, and worry about your own needs later.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I welcome and serve others in your name, O God, so I share your goodness and life.

#### **Friday 24 March 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Samuel 15:22-31

**Reflection:** The final nail in the coffin of Saul's reign as king of Israel was when he chose not to obey in full the command that Samuel told him God had given. (We must note that the command to destroy every man, woman, child and animal of the enemy reflects Samuel's understanding of God far more than it reflects the character of the God revealed in Christ). Saul's decision to hold the enemy king captive, and to retain some of the livestock for himself was in direct defiance of what he had been told by the prophet Samuel to do. When Samuel confronted him, he made excuses. He claimed that he was only doing what the people wanted, that he had intended to sacrifice the livestock to God, and he skirted around the fact that he had brought the enemy king back as a captive. Saul's

attitude revealed his arrogance, his self-centredness, and his need for the people's approval – all of which were flaws that damaged his reign significantly. This is why he ultimately failed as king, and was replaced by David.

On Sunday the Gospel reading draws attention to how we choose to see the world - through the lens of faith in Christ and his ways, or through the lens of our own selfish desires, power games, and need for status and recognition. Saul is a good example of the latter. But in Christ we are called to a different way. We are called to believe that Jesus' way of living, the Kingdom of God way, really is the best for us and for our world. We are called to follow this way wholeheartedly and embrace both the cost and the benefit of living with grace, servanthood, justice and love. And we are called to align our priorities, values and behaviour with those of Christ a little more each day - which was what Saul was unwilling, or unable, to do.

Where are you tempted to obey God half-heartedly, or make excuses for not following Jesus' way? How can you make your commitment to God's Reign more wholehearted today?

**Practice for Today:** Jesus' call to follow him is not a once-off thing. It is a daily challenge to embrace, a little more wholeheartedly, the values and priorities of Jesus, and to give our lives to live his cross-bearing way. This means that each day we need to dedicate ourselves to Christ anew. Today, renew your commitment to the way of Jesus, and seek to be a little more intentional about aligning your life with his values and priorities.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I commit myself to your way, Jesus, and align my life with your priorities and values.

### **Saturday 25 March 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 23

**Reflection:** The "Shepherd Psalm" has brought comfort and strength to God-seekers for millennia. There is something in the simplicity and honesty of these words that touches almost every heart in a deep and moving way. Perhaps that's why it is so often used as one of the readings at funerals. The words of this song have the power to carry us through times of great grief. The attitude expressed in this song is very different from that of Saul, on which

we reflected yesterday. King David who succeeded Saul, and who is traditionally believed to be the writer of this Psalm, was not a perfect person either. But, somehow he was able to keep his sight clear enough that he stayed true to his trust in God, and sought to build his life and his reign on God's values as he understood them. He didn't always succeed, but this attitude ensured that he was remembered as the greatest king of Israel.

Part of the appeal of Psalm 23 is that, in its few short verses, it explores the whole of human experience: concern for our basic needs for provision and security; the promise of rest and peace in the midst of a world in turmoil; assurance of God's presence and strength in our times of weakness, struggle and conflict; and the eternal promise of being welcomed into God's life. There is no pretence that life will always be easy. There is simply quiet trust that whatever we face, God remains faithfully present to us, and God's strength and guidance will carry us through. In its most basic and beautiful form, Psalm 23 reflects what authentic faith is all about.

How can you shape your faith to reflect that of this Psalm a little more today?

**Practice for Today:** The gift of the Scriptures, and especially of the Psalms, is that they show us how faith is expressed, and how it sustains us, in all of life's experiences, good and bad. They also shape and nurture our faith so that it conforms more and more with the biblical ideal, which, of course, finds its best expression in the life of Jesus. Today, try to give a little extra time to the Bible, and open your heart so that it may shape your faith to be a little more like that of Jesus.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I witness the faith of biblical believers, O God, may my own faith come to be more like that of Jesus.

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