

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

26 March - 01 April 2017

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

In our daily lives we all make choices (consciously or subconsciously) about what we will see and what we won't. It's tempting to choose not to see the suffering and injustice in our world – to switch off the news, and to ignore reports of grief, war and trauma. It's tempting to avoid seeing certain people and to allow them to just blend in with the landscape, removing their need and struggle from our vision. It's tempting to avoid seeing God's truth and grace in those with whom we disagree, and whom we would rather see as "all bad". It's tempting to avoid seeing the brokenness in those we support and with whom we agree and to see them as "all good". It's tempting to avoid seeing the resources, the opportunities and the capacity we have for making a difference, and to rather believe we can do nothing.

But, if we have really seen Jesus, and if we have truly seen God's reign proclaimed and manifest in Christ, then we have to confront how we see things, and allow God's grace and mercy, God's truth and justice to change our seeing and shed light on our world, our relationships and our neighbourhoods. And our seeing must be informed by God's perspective where the greatest are the least, and where everyone – even a young shepherd boy, or a carpenter from the countryside – can make significant differences in the world.

This week we meditate on what and how we see.

### **Sunday 26 March 2017**

**Reading:** John 9:1-41

**Reflection:** When Jesus and his disciples encountered a man who had been blind from birth, the disciples responded according to the current understanding that some sin must have caused this affliction. Jesus denied this and healed the man, setting off an inquisition among the religious leaders because the healing had been done on the Sabbath. Instead of recognising God's power

working through Jesus, the Pharisees chose to remain blind, and insisted that Jesus had to be a sinner, as was the blind man for questioning their judgement. Throughout this passage the ideas of blindness, sight, light and darkness keep coming into play. But, the Gospel writer is doing more than just telling a story. He is challenging his readers to consider whether they have seen Jesus clearly, or, like the Pharisees, have chosen blindness.

We may be tempted to distance ourselves from the Pharisees too easily. We may want to believe that we see Jesus clearly, since we have chosen to follow him. But, when we reject those who think or act differently from us, we choose to be blind to the Jesus in them. When we act as if Jesus is nothing more than the source of "blessings" for us to enjoy in this life, and a guarantee of bliss in the next, we choose to be blind to Jesus' call for us to carry our crosses, and to share in the mission of God's Reign. We all run the risk of choosing to see only what we want, and to remain blind to anything that challenges or changes us. But, if we will allow Jesus to open us to the truth about ourselves, others, God and our world, we learn to see from God's perspective, and everything changes - most especially we who are called by Jesus' name.

How can you allow God to open your eyes a little more today?

**Practice for Today:** It is easy to make our prayer lives a shopping list for God to hear and then act on. But, true prayer is as much an act of listening as it is an act of speaking. When we take time to listen to the promptings of God's Spirit, then we begin to see things from God's perspective, and then our prayers become far more effective, because they align with God's heart. Make time to listen to God in your prayer time today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I listen to the promptings of your Spirit, O God, my eyes are opened to see from your perspective.

### **Monday 27 March 2017**

**Reading:** Isaiah 59:9-19

**Reflection:** While today's prophecy from Isaiah is tough to read, it also contains a message of hope. After the exile, the people of Israel struggled to rebuild their devastated nation. But, it seems that they had not really learned their lesson. They remained stuck in the same

habits that had led to their downfall in the first place. They cried out for justice, but continued to oppress others, collude in corruption, and deny God's ways. They had become blind by choice and were stumbling around in the darkness of their brokenness and sin, unable to see how God's ways of justice, generosity, and love could free and heal them. Yet, in spite of this, God promised to step in and bring justice. God would ensure that the oppressed were rescued, and that people from east and west would honour God's ways.

Even though we may be blinded by the sin, corruption and evil in our world, God is not. And God is always at work to open the eyes of those who can bring peace, justice and liberation to those around them. Even when it seems that God is far off, the truth is that God is always right with us, and is always at work within and among us. All we need is to learn to see it and participate with what God is doing.

Where do you see God's presence and grace at work in your world today? How can you participate in what God is doing?

**Practice for Today:** With all the constant news reports of the violence, corruption and evil around us, it can be hard to see the world as anything other than bad. But, if we want to see God at work in the midst of the pain, we need to learn to see differently. This is where the practice of praise can be such a healing and uplifting gift. When we praise God we learn to recognise God's presence and activity in our lives, and then we become more aware of how God is at work in our world. Today, allow your praises to open your eyes to God's presence and power.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, because even when I can't see you, you are always at work in my life and my world.

### **Tuesday 28 March 2017**

**Reading:** Colossians 1:9-14

**Reflection:** The apostle Paul was faithful in prayer for the various Christian communities with whom he had contact. As we read the many prayers that he mentions in his letters, we may find ourselves wishing that someone would pray for us like this. There is a depth of compassion and a tender care that is very moving in his words. Today's reading, which is a prayer for the Colossian Church, is no different. At the heart of this prayer is Paul's longing that the

believers should learn to see the world in a certain way, and live in the world as children of the light. The apostle prays that these followers of Christ would know God's will and would receive spiritual wisdom and understanding. This new way of thinking and being would then lead them to live fruitful lives that would honour God in all things and would draw them into deeper communion with God.

The prayer ends with a celebration of what God has done for God's people. God has given us a share in the inheritance that belongs to God's people of the light, and has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness. Now we live in the kingdom of Christ and enjoy the freedom and forgiveness that Jesus gives. What this reveals is that our ability to see through God's eyes – to perceive the world and live in it as people of the light – is a gift. We can respond to God's grace, and we can open ourselves to God's transforming Spirit, but it is God who opens our eyes to see things from God's perspective. It is God who shifts our priorities, values, and behaviour from those of the kingdom of darkness to those of the kingdom of light. We only need to receive this gift with thanksgiving and openness.

How can you open yourself to God's Spirit and light a little more?

**Practice for Today:** The practice of invocation is really a way of opening ourselves to God's transforming work. When we invite the Spirit to fill us and to work in and through us, we are placing ourselves in a position in which we can be shifted in our thinking and behaviour to become a little more like Jesus. Today, invite the Spirit to move your thoughts and actions out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Come, Holy Spirit, and open my eyes and my life to the influence of your light.

### **Wednesday 29 March 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 9:27-34

**Reflection:** Today's reading is part of a longer series of miracle stories. Just before this passage Jesus healed a synagogue leader's daughter who had died, and he healed a woman who had suffered from constant menstrual bleeding for twelve years. Then we read of this healing of two blind men. Although Jesus told them to keep their healing a secret, they spread the news widely, which must have

made things more difficult for Jesus as his fame spread. It does seem to have had a negative impact on his relationship with the religious leaders who grew increasingly threatened by his ministry. Then, when Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, they accused him of doing so through the power of evil.

The Gospel writer, it seems, wants to draw our attention to the way the ministry of Jesus opened some eyes and caused others to choose a wilful blindness. The challenge for us, of course, is to decide how we will respond to Jesus. Will we choose to close our eyes to God's presence and purposes revealed in Jesus, or will we allow Jesus to open our eyes to see the world his way, and to respond according to his values and priorities? This is a decision we will each need to make every day.

How are you choosing wilful blindness in your life today? How can you let go and allow Jesus to teach you see the world in his way?

**Practice for Today:** While we may be followers of Jesus, and we may have had our eyes opened in so many ways, we all have places where we choose blindness. We may choose not to see those in need for fear of the demand it will place on us. We may choose not to see those with whom we disagree as people. We may choose not to see God's call for us to reach out to others. When we choose such blindness we rob ourselves and others of life. But, when we confess our refusal to see, we can be healed. Today, whenever you are tempted to close your eyes, confess it and ask God to heal you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** When I am tempted to close my eyes to the world and your work in it, O God, heal me and open my eyes.

#### **Thursday 30 March 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 130

**Reflection:** Today's reading from the Psalms is one of those passages that is so comforting because of the way it resonates with our own experiences of pain and despair. We do not know for certain what the specifics were of the writer's experience. We only know that he was in some sort of depression. It may well have had something to do with some personal failing, which would explain the confession of verse 3. Nevertheless, whatever this Psalmist had

done, or whatever his circumstances may have been, he expressed his trust in God's grace and his longing for a sense of God's presence. He knew that God would offer forgiveness and that God's presence would be his redemption. He also knew that God's love would never fail him. No matter how bad things get, God is always able to open our eyes to resurrection, and bring hope out of despair.

Sometimes we find ourselves in dark places because of something that has been done to us. Sometimes we end up in darkness because of something we have done. And sometimes we find ourselves in despair simply because life has taken a tragic or traumatic turn. The cause of our struggle is less important than what we do with it. We can wallow in our pain and allow the darkness to consume us. Or we can trust in God's gift of resurrection, in God's forgiveness, and in God's ability to lead us back to the light. If, like the Psalmist, we affirm our faith and call ourselves to place our hope in God, we will never be disappointed. We may not be delivered in the way we expect, but, in time, we will find a secure and comforting home in God's presence again.

Where is life tempting you to despair? How can you place your hope in God, and trust in God's presence to heal and restore you?

**Practice for Today:** One of the effective practices that the Psalmist used to strengthen his trust in God's presence was thanksgiving. As he remembered God's grace and forgiveness, God's unfailing love and redemption, he was able to trust in God more firmly, and to take comfort in the knowledge that God was with him and would restore him. Today allow your thanksgivings to strengthen your faith and uplift you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** No matter what my circumstances I give you thanks, O God, for your unfailing love and your redemption.

#### **Friday 31 March 2017**

**Reading:** Ezekiel 33:10-16

**Reflection:** The Bible is clear – God brings life out of death. There is always a chance to start again, and to return to life. On Sunday the Gospel reading is the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. While this account tells of a miraculous resuscitation, the Gospel writer also uses it to explain how Jesus brings life where

there is death. The message for us is to recognise that we do not need to die physically before we find life. We simply need to open ourselves to the life giving power of Christ and allow our lives to become carriers of the life of Jesus.

In a similar way the prophet Ezekiel was tasked by God to call God's people to life. He used the image of a watchman, and described himself as one who was called to alert the people to the things that would lead them to death, and call them back to the ways that lead to life. He offered both a hope and a warning. The hope was that, no matter what they had done in the past, if they changed (repented) and chose to do things God's ways, they could still find life and restoration. The warning was that, no matter what they had done in the past, if they turned from God's ways, they could still bring destruction on themselves. We all know the warning to be true. We have all experienced times when one slip has led us into grief. But, we also know the truth of the hope that God gives – that if we seek to follow God's ways of life, none of our past wrongs will ever be considered by God again. We get a clean slate, and we can enjoy God's life as if we had never left it. This is not about reward and punishment. It is simply a consequence of the choices we make.

How can you choose life today?

**Practice for Today:** You may have noticed how, when the prophet spoke of the kind of actions that God considered life-giving, they were all about how we treat other people. God's life is always experienced when we share it through acts of compassion and service. Today choose life by seeking to share life with others in whatever way you can.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I live according to your ways of love and life, O God, so I find life for myself and share life with others.

### **Saturday 01 April 2017**

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

**Reflection:** The Gospel writers indicate that Jesus knew that he would die. He understood his world well enough to know that his teachings would make the religious and political leaders of his day nervous, and that his popularity and challenge of human empires would result in his execution. But, it seems that he was also pretty

certain that he would survive death and reveal the power of life through his resurrection. He saw the prophecies in the Scriptures that spoke of a suffering and rising Messiah, and had the faith to trust them. But, he also needed his disciples to believe, and so he not only appeared to them, but he taught them about God's plan and trained them to share it with others. Then, as he prepared to leave them for the last time, he instructed them to receive God's empowerment and to be witnesses to his life throughout the world. But, implied in this commissioning is the fact that his disciples would have to be willing to face the same kind of persecution from the powers-that-be as Jesus did. Certainly Jesus taught this many times in his ministry.

This is always the journey of faith. We begin by encountering Christ and coming to faith in his life and sacrifice. Then, we receive God's power for ourselves and begin to share God's life with others. But then, as we learn to live the Jesus way, and as we challenge injustice and hatred in our communities, we often face opposition and sacrifice. But, it in this giving of ourselves for the sake of Christ that we really discover the sustaining, liberating life of God.

How can you move from just receiving Christ's life to being willing to lay down your life to bring life to others?

**Practice for Today:** The first, and most simple way, we share life with others is through welcoming them as brothers and sisters. This means that we need to step out of our comfort zones and reach out to them, but it may also mean that we need to release our feelings of disagreement, judgement, or dislike for the other person. Today, try to welcome everyone with the warmth and love of Jesus.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I welcome others in your name, Jesus, so your life flows through me to them.

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