

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

02 - 08 April 2017

Thought for the Week:

For every follower of Christ resurrection is both a promise and a challenge. It is a promise that opens us to God's life that inspires and empowers us every moment. It is a challenge not to shy away from the sacrifices and struggles that we will inevitably face as we work for life and justice in our corner of the world. Daily we are called to lay down our own comfort and embrace simplicity for the sake of those who are poor. We are called to think carefully about what we buy and where, what we eat and how much, and how we do business for the sake of those who face oppressive trade restrictions and unfair exploitation by the wealthy and powerful. In our own relationships we are called to give up our need to be right, our need to protect ourselves and our fear of those who are different and 'alien' to us, in order to bring life and grace to those who need it. Even our worship calls us to lay down our own preferences in favour of others so that they may encounter God in the way that is most helpful and transforming for them, rather than fighting for our own preferred styles and forms.

All of this sacrifice can only be done if we truly believe in and embrace the promise of resurrection – for ourselves, that we will be led to life, and for our world, that our small contribution will make the world a more whole and alive place.

This week we explore how the promise and challenge of resurrection leads us to give ourselves for the sake of others.

Sunday 02 April 2017

Reading: John 11:1-45

Reflection: The raising of Lazarus is one of the high points in John's Gospel. The writer indicates that this was the final straw that caused the religious leaders to seek Jesus' death. It is ironic that it was in bringing life to someone else that Jesus' own life came under threat, but that is the message of all the Gospels – Jesus loved

bringing life to others to such an extent that he preferred to give up his own life, rather than save himself and allow others to die.

But, it is only possible to be this free with our lives when we believe, wholeheartedly, in resurrection. Although technically Lazarus was resuscitated, not resurrected (he died again later), this story reveals the deep faith that Jesus held in the power of life over death. Jesus was not afraid of death because he knew that death was not the final word. Death for Jesus was neither an enemy, nor, in a sense something to be conquered or overcome. Rather, death was a part of life, something to be received and then absorbed and transformed into a deeper, fuller life. And he was eager for others to understand this and to lose their fear of death in their celebration and enjoyment of life. This is why he challenged Martha to believe that he is the resurrection and the life.

The truth is, when we allow the fear of death to take hold of us, we do not overcome death. Rather, when we grow afraid of death, we lose life. We become self-protective and we stop loving and living freely and openly and generously. This is why, as followers of Jesus, faith in resurrection goes beyond simply believing in life after death. It's about believing in life here and now, in the midst of death, and refusing to allow death to rob us, or anyone else, of life.

How can you release your fear of death today?

Practice for Today: The fear of death draws our eyes on to what is wrong, what is dangerous and threatening, and on what could hurt us. This makes us afraid and self-protective. But, when we focus on life, we see what is possible, what heals, and what brings life. But, we must choose, each day, what we will focus on. This is where praise is so powerful - it trains us to focus on God and God's life. Today, allow praise to free you from a focus on death and train your eyes and heart on life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your life that cannot be quenched by death.

Monday 03 April 2017

Reading: Acts 20:7-12

Reflection: I'm not sure how many of us would have been willing to

keep listening to Paul after his drawn out sermon had put a young man to sleep and caused him to fall out of a window to his death. But, Paul didn't seem to consider that there might be a problem. He had come to trust in Christ's resurrection life to such an extent that he simply took the young man into his arms and pronounced him alive. Then, he took everyone back into the room and continued to preach until morning! This meant that Paul had tremendous confidence in his message, and was willing to do whatever it took to share it with others.

Something about Paul and his message must have been compelling for his listeners. For them to sit and listen for so long, and to continue to do so after the frightening fall of Eutychus, must indicate that they valued Paul's message as highly as he did, and they longed to experience the life he shared. We can only assume this is because they saw evidence of that life in Paul's life - and the raising of Eutychus would have confirmed what they had seen in him.

As followers of Christ we are called to radiate God's life in a similar way. We may not raise anyone from death, but we can bring life as we love and serve those around us. How can you radiate God's life today?

Practice for Today: Sometimes we make resurrection far too spiritual. We make it about complex ideas and jumping through various doctrinal hoops. This is not bad in itself, but if we seek to share life with others it will be less about ideas and more about actions. To share life simply means, like Paul, to trust that we have God's life within us, and to help others to experience that life as we serve them however we can. Try doing this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I serve those around me, O God, so I share your life with them.

Tuesday 04 April 2017

Reading: 2 Kings 4:18-37

Reflection: When a wealthy woman and her husband created a room for Elijah to stay in on his travels he was grateful and sought to do something for them in return. When he discovered that they had no children, he promised her a son. But, when the boy was struck down by a mysterious illness and died, she was distraught, not just

because of her grief, but because the gift, for which she had not asked, had been taken from her. And so she went to confront the prophet, who had compassion on her and brought her son back to life.

The writer of the book in which this account appears was, in all likelihood, seeking to explain to the people of Israel why God had allowed them to be conquered and exiled. A story like this would have driven the writer's message home very strongly. Those who live with justice and kindness, enjoy God's gift of life. Those who embrace injustice and selfishness, walk the road to death. Whenever we share life, by treating others with kindness, compassion and respect, our experience of life grows and expands. But, when we try to keep life for ourselves, we diminish our own ability to really live. This is why Jesus taught that those who save their lives will lose them, but those who willingly give up their lives will find them. The woman in today's reading shared life with Elijah, and her experience of God's life was expanded as a result.

Who needs you to share life with them today?

Practice for Today: One of the simplest ways we can share life with those around us is to pray for them. True prayer is not just words, but an expression of deep care and love, and it often leads us to action in which we seek the best for those for whom we pray. Today, pray for those who need a touch of God's life in your world, and then allow your prayers to lead you into life-giving actions.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Hear my prayers, O God, for I seek to share your life with others as I bring their needs to you.

Wednesday 05 April 2017

Reading: Matthew 22:23-33

Reflection: The two groups within the leadership of Israel, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, did not like each other very much. But, when it came to Jesus, they both wanted to discredit him, and they tried a number of strategies to do so. In today's reading we see the Sadducees trying to undermine Jesus' teaching about God's life. They did not believe in the resurrection, and so they told Jesus a hypothetical story that would, in their minds, reveal the absurdity of the resurrection. They hoped that he would struggle to answer, and

that this would make him seem less wise. But, Jesus saw through them and gave an answer that pointed them, and the crowds who were listening, to God's unquenchable life.

Notice that Jesus did not say that people become angels when they die, but that, in terms of marriage, they would be like angels. Jesus was responding to the idea that, in marriage, a woman was the possession of her husband, and that she could be passed from brother to brother with no concern for her needs and feelings. But, in God's Realm, Jesus said, no one is given to any other. Life is not found in controlling or owning another person, but when we all seek to allow each other the freedom to find God's best life. And, in his final comments, Jesus made it clear that the life God gives us endures beyond the grave. So, when we seek to liberate others so that they can find life, we are giving them a gift that lasts for eternity!

Who needs you to set them free to find life today?

Practice for Today: One of the hardest, and most important, practices of the Christ-following life is that of letting go. We often talk about "letting go and letting God", but it is far more important to learn to let go of one another. We too easily seek to control and own our families, friends or co-workers, and in doing this we often suffocate them or rob them of life. But, when we let them go, and trust them to God's care, we liberate them for life. This doesn't mean we stop caring or engaging with them. It simply means we stop trying to control or manipulate their choices and decisions, while assuring them of our love and support in all things. How can you let go of your loved ones a little more today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: I trust your love and life, O God, and so I release my loved ones to you.

Thursday 06 April 2017

Reading: Philippians 1:1-11

Reflection: Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the most joyful and inspiring epistles in the New Testament, in spite of the fact that it was written while Paul was in prison. Notice how he hardly mentions his incarceration, and how there is not a word of complaint about his hardships. Instead he focusses on celebrating the Philippian believers, and in expressing his love for them. At the heart

of his reflection on their faithfulness and commitment, Paul states his trust that it is God who is at work in them and who will complete the work of refining and purifying their faith. Yet, even as he places his trust in God, the apostle also seeks to share what he has learned, and to remind them of what is truly important so that they will live lives of fullness, generosity and joy.

This is the paradox of our relationship with God. God calls us, equips us and works in us to fulfill the purpose of our lives. But, we don't just sit back and do nothing. We are called to cooperate with God's Spirit, to work hard to learn and grow, and to use our abilities and resources to share Christ's love and life wherever we can. God's life is a free gift, but in order to experience God's life, we need to participate in God's saving purposes and open ourselves to God's Spirit. And when we do this, not only do we experience God's vibrant life, but we share life with everyone we meet.

How can you trust God to complete God's work in you today? And how can you cooperate with God's work in order to go deeper into God's life?

Practice for Today: A feature of Paul's confidence in God's life, and in the Philippians' ability to embrace God's life, was his thankfulness. As he gave thanks, he remembered all that God had done in the lives of these faithful believers, and he remembered all that they had done to participate in God's mission. This inspired his faith even more. Today allow your gratitude to inspire your faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, for your work in me, and for my ability to work with you.

Friday 07 April 2017

Reading: Job 13:13-19

Reflection: The whole book of Job is written like a series of court cases. It begins with the heavenly court where the adversary brings an accusation against Job that he only follows God's ways because of the blessings he has enjoyed. Then, when disaster strikes Job's life and family, Job's friends come like witnesses in an earthly court to testify that he must have done something wrong to deserve such "punishment" - even though they can't point to any specific wrongdoing. Finally, Job demands to plead his case before God,

insisting on his innocence and crying out for justice and mercy. This is the heart of today's reading.

The power in the parable of the book of Job is that it reveals a number of important truths about life and about God. It teaches that suffering is not always the result of sin, but that sometimes the innocent suffer through no fault of their own. It shows how easy it is to judge others with no knowledge of what is really going on, and how destructive this is to all concerned. And it reveals that God is not afraid to be challenged by human beings. God is not so aloof and uninvolved that we are prohibited from questioning, challenging or arguing with God. On the contrary, when we have a relationship with God that is trusting and open enough, we find freedom and healing and life in sharing our true struggles and complaints with God. Also, when we have such a relationship with God it keeps us from judging others and nurtures compassion within us.

What argument do you need to have with God today?

Practice for Today: The practice of lament is one of great healing and freedom. When we honestly and openly share our struggles, complaints and disappointments with God, we open a door for God's Spirit to meet us where we are, and to heal and comfort us. Today, if you have any questions, complaints or grievances, share them with God honestly and openly.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I don't understand life's complexities and pains, O God, I come to you and argue my case.

Saturday 08 April 2017

Reading: Mark 10:32-34

Reflection: Tomorrow we begin the journey through the last week of Jesus' life. As we journey through Holy Week, we are faced with the destruction, expediency and self-protection of human power games, and the suffering and destruction that our evil desires and actions bring on others. But, we also explore how the tough, but simple, choice to step out of these games and to love freely and recklessly can bring healing and freedom into our world. This was the choice that Jesus made, and it is the choice he calls us to make each day.

Jesus was not taken by surprise when he was forced to sacrifice

himself for the sake of love and justice. He knew how the world works, and he knew what love would cost when the powers of greed, domination and human self-centredness were threatened. And so, long before he actually arrived in Jerusalem in the Palm Sunday procession we celebrate tomorrow, Jesus had warned his disciples of the sacrifice he would be making.

But, of course, Jesus also knew something else. He knew that love and life were unquenchable and that, even though he would die, his life would not end. And so he predicted his resurrection, and sought to comfort and strengthen his disciples with the knowledge that life always has the last word. It would take until after the resurrection for them to understand this truth, but when they did, it changed everything for them.

As we look at the world we may be tempted to believe that evil and corruption hold all the power. But, if we believe in resurrection, we know that this is not the case. As you prepare for Holy Week today, how can you reaffirm your faith in God's unquenchable life?

Practice for Today: If the Scriptures preach one message consistently it's this - life always conquers death. Or perhaps, more accurately, life always absorbs death and makes it part of life. Today, spend time in the Scriptures meditating on this truth again.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I meditate on your word that proclaims, O God, that your life is never extinguished.

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