

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
Holy Week 09 - 15 April 2017

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

Once again we come to what many consider to be the most significant week in the Christian Calendar. For the next seven days we journey through the last week of Jesus' life, through the conflict, rejection, execution and burial of Christ. What makes this journey so important is that it reveals the true values of God's Reign. What appears as failure and death to human beings, is victory and life in God's eyes. What looks like the triumph of power, wealth and human systems, actually exposes the poverty and destruction of human competitiveness and self-protection. It is not Jesus on trial this week, but the desire for accumulation, power, and instant gratification that resides in each of our hearts. The cross shows what happens when we reject the way of love and justice, when we choose power, pleasure and possessions over the generous and compassionate ways of God's Reign.

For most of us, the battle between our worst selves and our best selves is not waged on large public platforms. It does not impact global issues, or affect millions of people. But, as we each face our own temptations and demons and overcome them by the grace and love of God, so we make the world a better place for ourselves and those whose lives we do touch - our families, friends, coworkers and neighbours.

This week we meditate on Christ's sacrifice and how it teaches us to find life by giving our lives for the sake of God's Reign.

### **Palm Sunday 09 April 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 21:1-11

**Reflection:** It's interesting to note that even though there was a large enough crowd in the Palm Sunday procession to create quite a stir in Jerusalem, Jesus was not well enough known for people to immediately understand what was going on. The Gospel writer tells us that the people of the city wondered who the man at the centre of

the procession was. He also tells us that the crowds responded that Jesus was "the prophet from Nazareth". In spite of the prophecies that are quoted in today's reading, the people did not seem to grasp that Jesus was the Messiah, or that his procession into Jerusalem was a Messianic act. Yet there were some who seemed to be getting a sense that something important was happening. They sang of Jesus as the "Son of David" and "the one who comes in the name of the Lord". These were Messianic titles, so maybe some people had begun to understand.

There is one element that everyone seems to have missed, though - the fact that Jesus was processing in on a young donkey. This was certainly not the most dignified of transportation, and did not speak of power and majesty. Rather, it was the means of travel for ordinary folk. In the face of Rome's military might and the religious leaders' wealth and domination of their people, Jesus identified himself with ordinary people. He also revealed that God's Reign does not operate according to the values of human empires, but according to the upside-down values of humility, service and self-giving.

How are you tempted to reach for power and dominance over others today? How can you choose the way of humility and service instead?

**Practice for Today:** The humility that Jesus demonstrated on Palm Sunday was not a denial of who God had called him to be, nor was it about hiding his gifts and authority. Rather it was about standing to his full height, and using his gifts and abilities for the sake of others. It was about choosing love and service over self-aggrandisement. At the heart of this humility was the knowledge of who God was. This is why praise is so important - it keep us mindful of God and it keeps us humble. Today let your praises humble you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I praise you, O God, you show me my true worth and teach me humility.

### **Monday 10 April 2017**

**Reading:** Isaiah 42:1-9

**Reflection:** Today's prophecy from Isaiah is one of the famous "Servant Songs". The words are addressed specifically to God's chosen servant, the Messiah. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus

sought to fulfill the calling of the Chosen Servant, and so these words give a good summary of Jesus' mission. He came to bring justice to the nations, but he did not do this through violent retribution. Rather, he did it through quiet service, without the need to crush others or to raise his voice in anger. This work of Jesus is not yet finished. As verse 4 states, "He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth." This has not yet happened, so Jesus has not yet stopped working for it - and we are the people through whom Christ seeks to bring justice into the world.

The mission of Jesus in which we now share is built on a simple hope. God created the world and the people in it. God has given us Christ as a light to guide us and teach us how to bring healing and liberation to one another - as verses 6 and 7 show. And God has revealed the future to us through Christ - that ultimately injustice and evil will be vanquished and God's Reign will fill the earth with peace and love. Even as we journey through the darkness of Christ's suffering, and of our own, this hope sustains and strengthens us.

How can you draw hope today from Christ's presence and God's promise?

**Practice for Today:** When we face personal struggles, or see the suffering in our world, we can easily lose heart. This is why we need God's Spirit to keep reminding us of God's presence and the hope we have for the future. Today, invite God's Spirit to make God's presence and promise known to you in all you do.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Come Holy Spirit and remind me that God's presence is with me and God's promise is sure.

## **Tuesday 11 April 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 71:1-14

**Reflection:** A consistent theme in the Psalms is the cry for God's protection and help. It is comforting to recognise that God's people have always experienced times of hardship through no fault of their own, and that they have always turned to God for comfort and strength. The world has always known evil, destructive and violent people, and our age in history is no different. But, the world has also always known those who refuse to bow to evil forces and who trust in God's ways to triumph in the end.

The key to the Psalmist's faith is in two central commitments that stand out in today's reading. The first is the recognition that God is always with us and that, no matter what we face, we can stay connected to God through our praises. The second is the choice to make our lives an example to others, through our optimism, our hope, and our constant embrace of the ways of peace and love. When we are able to stay true to these commitments, God does become a refuge for us. We may still suffer, but even in our pain we will know God's presence, comfort and strength. This is how Jesus lived, and how he was able to face the cross with such grace and courage.

How can you renew your commitment to stay connected to God and to live by God's ways of peace, love and hope today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the ways we can keep our faith and hope strong is by being witnesses to the stories of others who have been sustained by God. This is one of the gifts of the Bible. It shows us how generations of believers lived out their faith before us. Today read one of your favourite Bible stories of faith and carry it with you, allowing it to strengthen your own faith.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I remember how my ancestors in faith trusted you, O God, it strengthens my own faith.

## **Wednesday 12 April 2017**

**Reading:** Hebrews 12:1-3

**Reflection:** After listing the names and circumstances of many faithful women and men whose stories are told in the Old Testament, the writer to the Hebrews returns his gaze to his contemporary companions in Christ. His words, written to believers centuries ago, still hold true for us today and they can strengthen and inspire us as we seek to live the Jesus way in our own lives.

Our ancestors in faith are still witnesses to our lives. They are not gone from us, but, according to this writer, continue to watch over us and bear witness to our faith. This knowledge can be a source of both comfort and strength as we strive to stay faithful to the race God has called us to run. But, it is not on these departed friends and loved ones that we must focus if we are to stay strong. Rather, it is on Jesus, who alone can create and nurture faith within us, that we

must fix our gaze. His example of holding on to the hope of resurrection, and enduring the excruciating suffering of the cross, is what will inspire us to endure whatever difficulties we must face. In addition, his place of honour with God, where he now prays for us, will remind us that our lives and struggles are not worthless, but have value in the mission of God. When we remember this, we can draw strength from Jesus' example, and learn from him to stay true even in the most difficult of times.

How can you allow Jesus' example of faithful suffering to strengthen you today?

**Practice for Today:** The gift of meditation, of using our imagination in prayer, is that it enables us to connect more deeply with the truths and stories of our faith. If we are to draw strength from Christ's sacrifice in order to stay true through our own struggles, we will need to meditate, imaginatively and deeply, on Christ's cross. Make time today to meditate on the cross and allow it to strengthen and comfort you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I meditate on your sacrifice, Jesus, I am strengthened and comforted.

### **Maundy Thursday 13 April 2017**

**Reading:** Exodus 12:1-14

**Reflection:** On this day each year Christians remember Jesus' last meal with his friends before his execution. The Gospel writers all try in different ways to link Jesus' death with the Israelite Passover meal. Jesus is often referred to as the "Lamb of God" and, as the lambs were slaughtered to protect the people of Israel from the plague of death that struck Egypt, so Jesus is presented as the one who protects us from the plague of death that has cursed our world. But, at the Last Supper, Jesus revealed how his work as the Lamb of God works - and it can be a surprising thing to reflect on.

Jesus was not concerned so much for what happens after we die - that's in God's hands. Rather, in John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus demonstrated to his friends how they were to live in this life in order to overcome the curse of death. They were to love one another, to serve one another and to lay down their lives for each other. As the Israelite lambs were sacrificed to liberate the people

from oppression and injustice, so Jesus sacrificed himself to liberate us from the oppression of power games, the constant drive to accumulate, and the addiction of our physical desires - the things that create such pain and evil in our world. But, he also challenges us to follow his example and to give ourselves sacrificially for one another so that together we can find life and peace and justice free from the oppressive force of our worst selves.

How can you become a "sacrificial lamb" and give yourself to heal and liberate someone else today?

**Practice for Today:** The call to sacrifice can sound scary and oppressive when we don't understand what it means. It is not common to think of sacrifice as a liberating act. But, Jesus tells us that when we love enough to lay down our lives for others we find life together - the best, most vibrant life possible. This love is not about how we feel. It's about how we act - seeking to always do what is in the best interests of the other person. This love makes our relationships deep and strong and joyful and life-giving. Today, seek to love someone practically by doing what is best for them.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you gave yourself to free me from oppression and evil, Jesus, so I give myself to bring freedom and love to others.

### **Good Friday 14 April 2017**

**Reading:** John 18:1-19:42

**Reflection:** Today's reading is rather long, but it invites us into an extended reflection on the suffering of Christ. We know the story so well, that it's easy to miss the drama and power of Jesus' sacrifice. The writer of John's Gospel goes to great lengths to show the difference between Jesus' behaviour and those of the priests, the soldiers, the political leaders and his disciples. All of the people around Jesus followed the course of expediency, self-protection, and accusation. Only Jesus acted with complete integrity, self-giving and forgiveness. The account of Jesus' death reveals very clearly what happens when we allow our worst selves to drive us. When we give in to fear and power games we inevitably scapegoat others and project on to them all the darkness we don't want to face within our own hearts. This is what was done to Jesus.

But, Jesus showed a different way to live. He did not allow fear to rule him, and he refused to play the power games of his opponents. Rather, he absorbed all the evil they threw at him and then responded in compassion, love and forgiveness. This is not an easy way to live, but it is the only way to find peace, justice and freedom for everyone. The challenge is for us to learn to live this way in our own lives.

How does the sacrificial death of Jesus challenge you today?

**Practice for Today:** It is almost impossible to read the account of Jesus' passion without recognising our own worst selves in those who rejected, denied or condemned him. It is also hard to witness Jesus' response to his accusers without feeling challenged to live with the same grace and love. Today, take time to read through the passion narrative again and allow God's Spirit to speak to you about how you can take up your own cross and follow the gracious way of Christ.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I witness your suffering, Jesus, teach me to live with grace and love as you did.

### **Holy Saturday 15 April 2017**

**Reading:** Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

**Reflection:** The prophet Jeremiah knew what it was to suffer for the sake of God's mission. Though he was faithful and spoke truth, he was persecuted greatly. His was a long and tough ministry, which is why he has traditionally been acknowledged as the author of the Book of Lamentations. These prayers of grief resonate strongly with Jeremiah's experience, but they also resonate with the experience of all those who suffer for the sake of goodness and justice. Today, as we hold vigil with Jesus in the tomb, we recognise the grief and pain he endured for the sake of love, and we can imagine these words applying to him.

But, as with all true lament, this prayer does not stop with grief and despair. The writer is honest about how bitter and painful his suffering is, but he refuses to allow that to define his whole experience. In the midst of his pain he chooses hope, and reminds himself of God's faithful love, and of God's mercies that are renewed each day. The book of Hebrews tells us that, in a similar way, Jesus

endured the cross because he hoped in the joy that would come (Hebrews 12:2). When we experience times of struggle, it is our hope that carries us through, and that strengthens us to stay faithful.

Today, whatever struggles you or your loved ones may face, wait with Jesus at the tomb and remember the hope of resurrection that God offers.

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes the best thing we can do to open ourselves to God's life and hope is to wait in silence and patience. On this Holy Saturday, as you wait for the resurrection celebration, spend some time in silent, patient waiting and allow God's hope to take hold of you again.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I wait on you, O God, so my hope grows stronger.

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