

## **Sacredise Daily Worship**

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

16 - 22 April 2017

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

The focus of this week, of course, is on the resurrection of Jesus. This central event of our faith is at the heart of what we believe as Christians - that life, and not death, has the last word. But, sometimes the way we believe in the resurrection robs it of its power. When we make resurrection a past event that happened only once in history to just one person, it may be an interesting occurrence, but it won't change anyone's life. When we make the resurrection about nothing more than a way to escape this world and reach life after death, we shut ourselves off from any chance that it could impact our lives here and now.

But, this is not how the first believers saw the resurrection of Jesus. As they learned to understand what this amazing event meant, they realised that resurrection was for everyone and for everything. There is nothing in all creation that is not to be resurrected into a new, imperishable life. The first believers also realised that we participate in the process of resurrection even now. As we learn to live the Jesus way, we experience God's resurrection life and we carry that life with us so that it touches those with whom we interact.

This week we explore what it means to believe in, and to live, the resurrection of Jesus.

### **Easter Sunday 16 April 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 28:1-10

**Reflection:** In the world of the New Testament, women were second class citizens. They were not considered reliable witnesses, and so they could not testify in a court of law. Yet, at the resurrection, it was the women who were the first witnesses, and they were instructed to pass the news on to the men. This is just one of the ways the resurrection turns the world upside down. When God's life breaks into our world, all the systems of discrimination and division that we have created come tumbling down. Suddenly we

recognise that God's life is within us all, and that we are all welcomed into God's saving grace.

The image of the angel rolling the stone away and then sitting on it is a moving, and rather humorous, way of showing how futile human attempts are to keep God contained. The religious leaders, fearful that the disciples would steal the body away, had ensured that the tomb was well sealed and guarded. But, God's life could not be contained in this way, and it broke out easily. Then, as if to confirm what they had heard from the angel, Jesus met the women on their way to tell their brothers the news. Not only is God's life unconstrained, it appears in the most unexpected ways and places, and often through the most unexpected people.

Are there any ways, in your life, that you try to contain God's life, or keep it for yourself and your group? How can you open yourself to experience God's unconstrained presence today?

**Practice for Today:** When we fill our lives with our own words – even if they're words of faith and praise – we can sometimes fall into patterns of thinking and seeing that keep us from experiencing God in new and surprising ways. But, when we make time to listen and open ourselves to the unexpected, we usually discover that God is far bigger than we thought. On this resurrection day, make some time for silent listening and allow God to reveal God's presence and life to you through the unexpected.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I wait and listen, O God, so you reveal your life to me in new ways.

### **Monday 17 April 2017**

**Reading:** Colossians 3:5-11

**Reflection:** Faith in Jesus' resurrection is not just about agreeing with an amazing idea. Nor is it primarily about what happens after we die. It is about how we live our lives here and now. If death cannot conquer life, then our entire lives must be about learning to reject the ways of death and to embrace the ways of life. This is the heart of the message in today's reading. Every one of the behaviours that the writer rejects brings pain and separation between people. Some of them prioritise our own desires over the well-being of others, while some cause us to treat others as

enemies, or as less than human. But, once Christ's life has taken hold of us, we can no longer live like this. Instead we commit to bringing fullness of life to as many people as we can.

Part of the reason for this new desire to treat others well is because of a new way we come to understand people. All the lines, categories and divisions that shape our relationships in human society fall away, and, in Christ, we see all people as bearers of God's image and life. This is why, in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, or any other distinction. This doesn't mean we stop being different. It just means that our differences are no longer a cause for conflict and suspicion. Instead we rejoice in the uniqueness of each person, because each one is a revelation of a unique facet of God's life.

How can you work to recognise God's life and image in each person you meet today?

**Practice for Today:** When we focus on ourselves, it is easy to view others with suspicion or fear. But, when we focus on getting to know and understand other people, and when we commit to serving them as Jesus would, we discover that they are no longer frightening. Instead we begin to see God's life within them in a new way. Today, seek to understand and serve each person you meet.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Your resurrection life, Jesus, is revealed and expressed through each unique human being.

## **Tuesday 18 April 2017**

**Reading:** Exodus 15:1-18

**Reflection:** You would think that after experiencing such a dramatic deliverance the people of Israel would never have reason to doubt God, or God's servant Moses, again. The account of how Israel was saved from their Egyptian bondage is told in the chapters preceding today's reading, and the final words of the previous chapter state that because of the way the Egyptians were defeated, the people believed. Their response was to sing the song of thanksgiving and praise that we read today. But, unfortunately, their faith did not last long. It took only a short while in the wilderness before the people were complaining and disbelieving again. This is because miracles, no matter how dramatic, are never sufficient to sustain a deep and

lasting faith.

This is why in the resurrection accounts Jesus spends a lot of time building relationships with his disciples. He didn't want them only to trust in a miracle – this could never have sustained them through the persecutions they would face. He wanted their faith to be in him, in a personal relationship with God. This is the big difference between the faith of the Israelites and the faith of the disciples. The other big difference is that the Israelites believed that God loved them and hated the Egyptians, while the disciples had come to learn that God loves everyone, including those who executed Christ. The only way to find a faith that is strong enough to love our enemies is through a deep and transforming relationship with the Risen Christ.

How can you nurture your relationship with Jesus a little more today?

**Practice for Today:** For most of us prayer easily slips into a constant attitude of asking and, perhaps, giving thanks. But, sometimes prayer needs to be more intimate. When we can give ourselves to prayers of devotion, of love, and of simply opening ourselves to God's presence, our sense of connectedness with God grows ever deeper. Today, try to "practice the presence of God" like this in everything you do.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I open myself to your presence, O God, and I offer you my love.

## **Wednesday 19 April 2017**

**Reading:** Joshua 3:1-17

**Reflection:** The generation that left Egypt had all died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb. So, when the people of Israel reached the Promised Land, this was a generation that had not experienced the miraculous escape from Egypt. Perhaps that's why God gave them a replay of the crossing of the Red (or Reed) Sea. The border of the new land was the Jordan River, and the people had to cross it to receive their inheritance. God instructed Joshua to prepare the people, and then God created a very similar miracle to the one that freed the people from Egypt. Yet, once again, in spite of the miracle, when the people entered the Promised Land, they still wrestled with unbelief and rebellion.

It may be that the writers of these accounts were not actually concerned with the miracles themselves. Perhaps the miracles were a way of describing what the experiences of the people were like. Crossing a sea or a large river is a major transition. The geography on the other side of these bodies of water is always different from that which we have left behind. For the Israelites escaping Egypt, the Sea symbolised their transition from slaves to free people. For the Israelites crossing the Jordan, the river symbolised their transition from being a homeless people to finding a home in which to settle and grow. Both of these transitions speak to every person of faith as we seek to move from being enslaved by our worst selves to freedom and finally to finding our home in God.

What “rivers” do you need to cross today in order to move into the next phase of your life in Christ?

**Practice for Today:** The practice of thanksgiving builds faith. When we face times of growth or transition, it can be helpful to give thanks for what has gone before in order to build our trust in God for whatever lies ahead of us. Today allow your thanksgiving to strengthen your faith for whatever new journeys God may be calling you to.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I thank you, O God, for what has come before, I strengthen my faith in your grace for what lies ahead.

#### **Thursday 20 April 2017**

**Reading:** Song of Solomon 2:8-15

**Reflection:** The love poetry of the Song of Solomon is a profound and helpful change from the stories and teachings that are the basis of most of our reflections on the Bible. Throughout the ages this book has been taken not just as a celebration of human love, but as a metaphor of the love between God and God’s people. This is consistent with the Bible’s tendency to use the language of human intimacy to describe our relationship with God.

In today’s reading a lover seeks out his beloved and invites her to come out into the world with him. Here winter is over and new life is breaking out everywhere. Here the life of the world is able to give life to the lovers and to their love for one another. This is how the Bible wants us to view the resurrection of Jesus. It is easy to get caught

up in intellectual or theological debates about life after death, and the nature of Christ’s resurrection body. But, while these discussions can teach us important truths, they cannot lead us into an experience of the Risen Christ. Sometimes they even become little distractions from experiencing God’s life, like the little foxes that destroy the vineyards. But, to encounter the Risen Jesus we need to open ourselves like lovers. We need to become aware that the Risen Jesus seeks us out like a lover and calls us to join him in a new world where the winter of death is past and where new life breaks out everywhere. Here, in this resurrection world, we find new life for ourselves and for our relationship with God, with others and with our world.

How can you follow Jesus, like a lover, into the new world of resurrection today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes we think that, in order to draw us closer to God, our praise must be focussed on God alone. But, when we learn to praise goodness, joy, beauty, truth and life wherever we find it, we discover that God’s life is at the heart of all of these things. So, as we celebrate the goodness and glory of our world, we enter the world with greater openness and we encounter Christ in his risen glory wherever we may be. Today, seek to praise goodness wherever you may find it.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I celebrate the goodness, beauty, truth and life that fills the world, O God, for in it I encounter your life.

#### **Friday 21 April 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

**Reflection:** It may be helpful to learn that some of the New Testament churches struggled to understand and believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Even for them, the idea of a crucified and risen Messiah did not make logical sense. But, it was this very surprising nature of God’s plan of salvation that helped to make the preaching of the apostles so effective. However, it was also because of the mystery of the resurrection that the apostles found themselves constantly required to remind the believers of the foundations of their faith. The Corinthian church, in particular, seemed to be struggling with the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection, and so today’s

reading offers the first part of a long teaching to clarify this important truth.

Notice how the apostle begins by rooting his faith, and that of the church, in the Scriptures. The first believers tried very hard to show people that Jesus' life and death were not a new thing, but had been God's idea from the beginning of time. What Jesus did flowed out of God's work through the Old Testament prophets. The same remains true for us - our faith in resurrection begins with the biblical witness. But it doesn't end there. The apostle goes on to describe the experience of various disciples of Jesus. Their faith was also rooted in their own experience of resurrection - and for most of them it was the experience that made the Scriptures clear. The same is true for us. Just quoting the Bible is not enough. We need an experience of Christ's life to really understand what the Bible is trying to tell us. The basic message is without doubt, though - death could not defeat Jesus, and it does not defeat us if we can hold on to our faith in resurrection.

How have you experienced God's resurrection life? How can allow your experience to open to you a new touch of life today?

**Practice for Today:** The gift of memory has always been an important part of spiritual practice among God's people. Our memories of God's work - in our lives and the lives of others - builds our faith and opens us to new experiences of God's grace. One of the best ways to employ our memory is through the practice of journalling. When we write down our spiritual journey we are able to go back and remember whenever we need a boost to our faith. Take some time today to journal your experiences of resurrection.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I remember how your life has touched me, O God, so I open myself to new experiences of resurrection.

### **Saturday 22 April 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 16

**Reflection:** There are few Psalms that express such assurance in God's care and presence as today's reading. After affirming that God is his refuge, the writer celebrates godly people with whom he can share God's grace. Then he rejoices in God as his inheritance, the one who blesses and provides for him, who instructs and

teaches him, and who is always with him. It is this trust in God, not in any outward or physical security, that makes it possible for the writer to be at rest and to feel safe - even though the first verse may indicate that he was under some kind of threat.

The heart of this song, though, is in the last two verses. Peter quoted verses 8-11 in his famous Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:25-28), and he interpreted verse 11 as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection. But these verses also apply to all of God's people. We will not rot in the grave for we know a life that is stronger than death. We are those to whom God has shown the way of life, and we enjoy the pleasures of living with God now and forever. When we have this sense of God's presence we are able to face whatever circumstances we may have to endure because we know that God's life is at work even in the midst of death. And when we have an eternal perspective, we are able to recognise that even the worst suffering will pass and healing will come. This provides a sense of safety and blessing in all things - and it is a miraculous gift!

How can you nurture a sense of God's presence and an eternal perspective in your life today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes in our worship we are invited to share in the saying of a creed. Creeds are simply statements of the truths in which we believe. The goal of creeds is not to prove anything to anyone. Rather they invite us to enter into God's story, to become part of it, and to allow God's life and truth to shape us and form the basis for our lives. There is a sense in which today's Psalm is a simple creed. Why not write your own short statement of faith in the resurrection and carry it with you throughout today?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I believe in your presence and life, O God, and I celebrate the safety and blessing I find in you.

---

Written by John van de Laar © Copyright 2017 Sacredise.

Readings "Reprinted from *Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings*, copyright © 2005 Consultation on Common Texts ([www.commontexts.org](http://www.commontexts.org))

*If you would like to receive these devotions for yourself, please go to [sacredise.com/daily](http://sacredise.com/daily)*