

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

21 - 27 May 2017

Thought for the Week:

In every life the question of God's presence is raised at some point. For many it is an academic issue related to the existence of evil in the world. But for most, it relates to our own personal struggles and pain, and our need to connect with something bigger than ourselves. Unfortunately, we may fall into thinking that God's presence is available only to a select, chosen few. Sometimes we may imply that God cannot be found except within the walls of our church buildings. We may even fall into the Old Testament view that those who suffer do so because of God's judgement, and those who have much are "blessed" by God's presence and provision. The result of this is that we have made God into a fickle, partisan deity who favours some over others, and who cannot be turned to for refuge in our darkest times. What a pity this is – and what a travesty of the Gospel.

The Scriptures make it clear that God's presence is everywhere, and that God draws close to all who need refuge and protection and comfort. Every human being "lives and moves and has their being" in God's presence. We need only to recognise this. God's gift of the Spirit is not some kind of spiritual "merit badge" for a chosen few. Rather it is available to all and offers comfort and strength for all. Our calling, as followers of Jesus, is to learn to see that God is at work and present in the most unexpected and surprising places, and then to help others to see it for themselves, and enjoy the healing and empowering that this spiritual sight brings.

This week we will explore the surprising ways in which God's presence comes to us.

Sunday 21 May 2017

Reading: John 14:15-21

Reflection: If we fall into the trap of thinking that God's Spirit is present only in some places and not in others, we diminish God's greatness and we rob ourselves of the gift of God's presence. But, in

today's reading, we learn why it may sometimes appear that God's Spirit is absent. In verse 17 Jesus says that "the world... isn't looking for the Spirit and doesn't recognise him". This reveals that, when we feel the Spirit's absence, it is not because God has abandoned us, but because we have not known how to look for and recognise God's presence. The challenge that arises from this truth is that we need to learn to be people who constantly seek and see the signs of God's presence, even in the most unlikely places and situations.

But, this ability to recognise God's Spirit is not about being a spectator. We don't just "see" the Spirit" we are invited to "receive" the Spirit - to be filled by God's presence and power. This is why Jesus promised the disciples that they would not be left as orphans, but that they would see him and live in him. This is true for us today - we also see Jesus and live in him when we learn to abide in the Spirit's presence. And, as we live in Christ, so we begin to live as Christ - obeying God's command to love as Jesus did, and revealing Christ to one another and to our world.

What signs of the Spirit's presence can you see in your life today?

Practice for Today: The ability to be aware of God's presence does not come naturally to human beings - as Jesus indicated. It is a skill we learn through constant practice. Spiritual disciplines, and especially the discipline of thanksgiving, teach us to recognise God's presence and activity in our lives, and to respond by receiving God's Spirit and living in God's power. Today allow your thanksgivings to open your eyes to God's presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your presence which is always with me, O God, I give you thanks.

Monday 22 May 2017

Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

Reflection: Our familiarity with the story of Noah, and our temptation to read it as science or universal history, can cause us to miss the impact of this account. The writers of the flood narrative were seeking to drive home some essential and universal truths about the nature of God's relationship with human beings. The cause of the flood was seen to be that humanity's sinfulness had grown to such an extent that it had corrupted the entire created

order. This means that the world needed to be “cleansed” (which is why the New Testament writers compare the flood to baptism) in order to be restored to relationship with God. But the result of the flood was not destruction. It was a new creation, and a new commitment from God to be present with, and to love, human beings. The rainbow was given as a sign of this covenant, and of God’s choice to remain in eternal communion with women and men.

It is not important what the actual event behind the Genesis flood story was. What is important is that the writer seeks to remind God’s people of God’s commitment to them, and of the amazing truth that not even the worst evil of the world can cause God to reject humanity. It is a gift of immeasurable grace that God has chosen us to be the objects of God’s love. It is a gift of indescribable value that God should choose to be present to us, and to draw us into a deep and eternal relationship with God. If we can remember this commitment - and perhaps allow the rainbows we see to be a sign to us - we will always be aware of God’s love and presence, no matter what trauma or brokenness we may endure.

How can you remember God’s commitment to you today?

Practice for Today: The Scriptures often speak of signs and altars as ways to remember what God has done. The rainbow of today’s reading is a sign like this. Another spiritual practice that is valuable as a way to remember God’s presence and work is journaling. When we make time to write our experiences and reflections of God’s activity in our lives, our awareness of God grows. Today, let your journal be a sign to remind you of God’s covenant with you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I remember, O God, that you are committed to me, that you are with me, and that you always love me.

Tuesday 23 May 2017

Reading: Deuteronomy 5:22-33

Reflection: It’s important to remember that today’s reading was probably written by a group of writers known as the Deuteronomists. They probably wrote their accounts of Israel’s history during the Babylonian exile of God’s people, and they wrote to explain why God had allowed God’s people to be conquered, and the temple to

be destroyed, by a heathen nation. Their answer was very simple – the people had been unfaithful and the destruction was the consequence. Verse 29 reveals the heart of the Deuteronomist’s challenge to their people: “Oh, that they would always have hearts...that they might fear me and obey all my commands!”

God’s cry for a faithful people is placed in the middle of the story about God’s encounter with the newly liberated nation at Mount Sinai. Having delivered the people from slavery, God sought to guide this new nation into a life of freedom, justice, and mutual care. This was the purpose of the law, and the reason why obedience is stressed so strongly in the Old Testament. But, when we fail to follow God’s ways, we inevitably end up in conflict, inequality, injustice, and apathy toward one another. When this happens, society breaks down, and we often bring destruction on ourselves – as happened with the Israelites. But, even more than this, when we follow God’s ways, we discover that God’s presence and grace flow into and through us, and the world becomes a place of greater health and wholeness.

How can you allow God’s ways to lead you into a deeper connection with God today?

Practice for Today: God’s ways are most clearly reflected in Jesus, but the whole of Scripture points to God and helps us to understand God. When we make study of the Bible a regular part of our lives, we learn to live God’s way, we experience more of God’s presence, and we become channels of God’s grace to those around us. Today, let your reading of the Bible lead you deeper into God’s ways.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I study the Scriptures, O God, so you guide me in your ways of life.

Wednesday 24 May 2017

Reading: John 16:16-24

Reflection: As the disciples listened to Jesus’ words in his final sermon before his death, they must have been very confused. They struggled to understand what he was saying, but they must also have been reluctant to accept his words. Jesus made it clear that grief and pain was ahead for them. He spoke of not being seen, and then being seen again – which referred to his imminent death. The

metaphor of seeing is important in John's Gospel. The writer commonly refers to those who think they can see but are blind, and to the way Jesus opens eyes, or enables us to see God's Reign. This is not about physical seeing, but is about seeing the truth of ourselves, of the world, and of Jesus and his mission.

Jesus' death and burial didn't just remove Jesus physically from the sight of the disciples. It also removed their ability to see him as God's appointed liberator. As Jesus died, most of the disciples fled for their lives, and lost hope in his values and purposes. Even after the resurrection it took some time for the power of Jesus' life to take hold of his followers. When we face the world's struggles we may also be blinded to the presence and purpose of Jesus in our lives. We may begin to doubt God's ways and God's sustaining love, and we may be tempted to do whatever it takes to survive, or to fall back into the self-protective ways of our society. This blindness can hurt us even more than our difficulties do. But, if we can keep our eyes on Christ, we find joy in the midst of grief, and we discover that we have direct access to God's presence and grace through Christ.

How can you keep your eyes on Jesus today, in spite of the struggles of the world?

Practice for Today: When we pray in Jesus' name, we place our lives and desires in alignment with the values and purposes of Jesus. This means that our prayers change to reflect the priorities of God's Reign. Then, as we pray, we begin to "see" God's presence in new ways, and we discover possibilities that were hidden before. Today, allow your prayers in Jesus' name to open your eyes to God's presence and grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray in your name, Jesus, hear my prayer and open my eyes to your presence.

Thursday 25 May 2017

Reading: Acts 1:1-11

Reflection: The Ascension is problematic if we try to use it as a description of the universe. The writer of Acts was not trying to offer proof that heaven is "up above" and that God is watching us "from a distance". His purpose was not to give scientific explanations, but to explain truths about Jesus. As we celebrate the Ascension today,

we do well to keep these truths in mind.

To begin with, the Ascension reveals that, unlike Lazarus, Jesus did not die again after his resurrection. The new life Jesus revealed is unquenchable and eternal, and it fills the entire cosmos. But, the Ascension also described Jesus as returning to God's presence in the flesh. This means that Jesus took our full humanity – body, soul and spirit – with him into God's presence and being. In the Ascended Christ, humanity and God are completely and eternally united, and even our bodies are part of God's life. Finally, the Ascension prepared the way for Pentecost which teaches that God has come to fill us through God's Spirit. So, not only has Jesus carried our humanity into the Godhead, he has also enabled the Godhead to come into us! This is hard to understand, but I encourage you to think about it through today.

How can you embrace the truths of the Ascension in your own life today?

Practice for Today: As we remember everything that Jesus has done for us and made possible for us, we can only respond in praise. Sometimes we praise God for things we barely understand, but as we express our awe, our hearts begin to grasp what our minds cannot. Today, praise Jesus as the Ascended One, and allow your heart to be filled with this amazing truth, even if your mind struggles to understand.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Risen and Ascended Jesus, I praise you for making me one with God and for filling me with your eternal life.

Friday 26 May 2017

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12

Reflection: In the Bible there are a few people who either did not die, or whose death was kept hidden from God's people. In Genesis a righteous man named Enoch is said to have disappeared "because God took him". Moses died on the borders of the Promised Land, but his grave was shrouded in mystery and no one knew where it was. And Elijah, the prophet, was caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire as his disciple, Elisha, looked on. The New Testament accounts of Jesus' Ascension (which are recorded only by the writers of Mark and Luke-Acts) seem to be trying deliberately to

resonate with the Elijah story, and to demonstrate that Jesus was even greater than the great prophet.

The account of Elijah's ascension is curious. Twice Elisha was warned about his master's coming departure and both times he seemed to be unconcerned about it. He seemed to know that there was a greater purpose at work - a passing of the mantle, of the prophet's power to his apprentice. Perhaps that's why he specifically asked to receive a double-portion of Elijah's spirit. If you keep reading, you will see that he got what he asked for, and Elijah's prophetic ministry was passed on to him. The Ascension of Jesus opens the door for a similar experience for us. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was a "passing of the mantle" from Jesus to his disciples. He had departed, but now they were to continue the work in his power - as are we today. Our faith in Jesus is not primarily about trusting in his saving work and waiting for heaven after we die. Rather, it is about receiving Jesus' Spirit and continuing his saving work in our own communities and contexts. We are the Elisha's to the Elijah who is Jesus!

How can you receive the Spirit today, and be part of the ongoing ministry of Jesus in your world?

Practice for Today: Elisha was bold to ask his master for a double portion of his spirit. Jesus promised that God would give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asked. Both of these truths teach us that God loves it when we ask for the presence and power of the Spirit in our lives. That's why we need the practice of invocation - of inviting the Spirit to move within us and among us. Today, keep a prayer of invocation on your lips and invite God's Spirit to lead you into ministry.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, and equip me to participate in the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

Saturday 27 May 2017

Reading: Psalm 93

Reflection: As Jesus prepared to enter the final phase of his life and ministry – going to the cross and beyond – he prayed for the disciples. Although he longed to return to his glory, he was more concerned for his followers to be empowered, to be united, and to

be faithful witnesses to his message and mission. This was the heart of his prayer, and it stretched through the ages to include all who would come to believe – including us. The prayer in John 17 (which is one of the set readings for tomorrow) is often called the "High Priestly" prayer. But, it can also be thought of as the prayer of a good monarch who cares for those under his care. The Scriptures certainly declare that Jesus is King in the Reign of God, and that he rules with justice, mercy and grace.

Today's Psalm celebrates God's kingship. The heart of this song is that God's Reign is eternal, and that not even the most powerful and chaotic of forces (the violently raging seas) can overcome it. But, verse 1 shows why this is so comforting for us. Because God's Reign is firmly established, so is the world. No matter what may happen, the world is based on God's life and power, and so it will stand secure. God's laws, and God's presence and purpose in the world, do not change, but are trustworthy and reliable. This means that God's presence can be a place of safety and restoration for us, and God's ways can be a source of wisdom and guidance as we navigate this chaotic world.

How can you live under the care and authority of this gracious divine Monarch today?

Practice for Today: The Bible constantly calls us to be aware of God's presence and God's Reign. The clear message is that we encounter God here in our world, and we learn to live as citizens of God's Reign right where we are. But, to do this, we need to watch and listen and learn to see the signs of God's Reign among us. As you go through today, ask God to open your eyes and ears to the presence and power of God in your world.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Open my eyes, O God, that I may see the signs of your Reign all around me.

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