

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

16 - 22 July 2017

Thought for the Week:

Sometimes it feels like God has gone silent. We may feel, at times, that we don't know how to hear what God is saying to us. We may watch others who claim to hear God speaking all the time, and wonder what they have that we don't. Or we may believe that we hear God speaking to us regularly, but we fail to listen to these messages with discernment, measuring them against what the Scriptures have revealed. We have all experienced moments when what is called the voice of God speaking turns out to be nothing more than personal preference or desire.

The Bible tells us that God has already spoken and given us all we need to live an abundant life. Perhaps before we seek special "words" from God, we should focus on trying to live according to the words we have already received. We may need the promptings of the Spirit to remind us of specific passages of Scripture, but no new revelation can ever replace what God has already revealed in the Bible.

This week we remember how God has already spoken to us, and we seek to live out what we have already heard through Jesus..

Sunday 16 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Reflection: The four types of soil in Jesus' parable represent different ways that people respond to Jesus' message. We often think of these as four different kinds of people, but we all have all four of these responses within each of us. Sometimes we receive Jesus' word, but our fears, longings, or personal priorities take precedence, and so the values of God's Reign don't take root in us. Sometimes we quickly respond and try to implement the ways of Jesus in our lives, but then fall back into old patterns and habits once the initial excitement has worn off. And sometimes we may really desire to follow Jesus, but the burdens of our relationships

and responsibilities get in the way. There are times, though, when Jesus' words sink deep into our souls and capture our hearts. Then, we are changed, and our lives begin to reflect the beauty and grace of Christ. And, since we are complex people, all four of these responses can be happening in us at the same time as we wrestle with different aspects of God's call.

The ideal would be for our whole lives to be good soil and for Jesus' message to always take root in us and bear fruit. While this seldom, if ever, happens in any life, it does raise the challenge of how we can increase the good, receptive soil in our hearts, and decrease the rocky, thorny, or shallow soil. This is the purpose of our spiritual journey - to allow God's word to take root in our lives a little more each day, and for our lives to slowly become more aligned with the values, priorities and habits of God's Reign.

How can you increase the good soil in your heart today?

Practice for Today: Daily spiritual practice leads us deeper into God's life, and creates the opportunity for God's Spirit to transform us so that we can receive more of God's word and bear more fruit. Any practice that increases our attentiveness to God's presence and direction is good. Whatever your most helpful practice is - stillness, walking a labyrinth, listening to music, praying, spiritual reading, or walking in nature - make special time for it today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I practice becoming mindful of your presence, O God, so my heart grows more able to receive your word.

Monday 17 July 2017

Reading: Micah 1:1-5

Reflection: The twin nations of Israel and Judah both fell into the same destructive behaviour. While the sin of both nations was instigated and directed by the leaders, the people simply went along with what they were told, and refused to listen to the prophets and challenge their authorities to change their ways. The result was that injustice, inequality between rich and poor, and social breakdown made both nations vulnerable to outside forces. In the end they both succumbed to conquest and many of the people were carried into

exile. This was the state of affairs that the prophet Micah addressed in his preaching. Today's reading from the start of his book jumps right into God's confrontation of the nation's sin, and reminds the people that they would have to face the consequences of their injustice and rebellion.

Like the people of Israel and Judah, we have choices to make each day. We can ignore the wisdom of Christ, and live for our own selfish, self-centred priorities, or we can embrace the ways of God, and seek to live by God's values. Either way there will be consequences. Both ways involve pain of some kind - either the pain of brokenness that comes from going our own way, or the pain of sacrifice as we give up our own small agendas for the sake of the Gospel. But, only the way of Jesus can give us joy, life and healing in the midst of pain. Only the way of Jesus can teach us to navigate the struggles of this world with grace, dignity and peace.

What choices are you facing today? How can you be sure to choose the way of Jesus?

Practice for Today: The reason Jesus emphasised the word of God in his parable of the sower and the seeds, is that God's word gives us the principles and guidelines we need for living the Jesus way. It also shows us the joy of following Jesus and the brokenness that comes we choose our own way. Today, spend time in Scripture and allow it to guide you in the ways of Jesus.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me your ways, Jesus, and empower me to walk in them.

Tuesday 18 July 2017

Reading: Psalm 92

Reflection: Reading the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving is always an uplifting experience. Although it is good to remember that there are many Psalms that cry out to God and that resonate with our doubts and griefs, Psalms of praise can bring us great comfort and courage. Today's reading describes the Psalmist's experience of God's work on his behalf. God has strengthened this singer, rescued him from trouble and brought him to a place of joy and abundance. And this is not just his experience. So many God-

seekers know what it is to flourish because of their relationship with God, and even in old age, God's people continue to make a contribution to the world - to produce fruit. For the Psalmist, it is amazing that there is anyone who cannot see the value in trusting God.

It is tempting to make our faith about what we receive from God. We like to feel that placing our trust in God "works" for us, ensuring that we are comfortable and secure. But, while the Psalmist does celebrate the benefits that faith brings to God's people, he is more concerned for how God's people continue to make a difference in the world because of their faith. Flourishing is less about being healthy, wealthy and happy, than it is about being able to contribute to the well-being of others, and to society in general. Whatever goodness we receive is simply a resource to enable us to bear more fruit. This is what Jesus means when he speaks about those who receive the word producing a harvest of abundance. When we have opened our lives to the power of God's word, we automatically become those who bring grace, life, justice and love to those around us.

What fruit is God asking you to produce today? What resources has God given you to enable you to do this?

Practice for Today: The praise of the Psalmist reminds him of God's goodness, and empowers him to produce fruit that contributes to the well-being of others. Today, allow your praises to be the inspiration for making a contribution to your world.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you for your goodness to me, O God, and I seek to share it with those around me.

Wednesday 19 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 13:10-17

Reflection: Whenever we are tempted to think that the Bible is supposed to be easy to understand, we would do well to read today's reading again. The disciples came to Jesus and asked why he taught in parables. Obviously, both Jesus' friends and the crowds who followed him were finding his words difficult to understand. Jesus' answer to their question is both surprising and disturbing. Not

everyone is open to understand the “secrets” of God’s Reign. Some will search for wisdom, and they will finally gain the insight they need to grasp it. But others will find it all too challenging, or too much work, and will not bother. These people will remain unable to see or hear or comprehend what God’s Reign is about. The principles of God’s Reign are not easy to grasp because they go against everything we are taught in human society, but they are so immensely precious that even the prophets longed to see what Jesus revealed.

This short discourse comes between the telling of the parable of the Sower and the explanation which Jesus gave to his disciples. The parables Jesus used seemed so simple on the surface, but they always had a twist that surprised and disturbed his hearers. Even his explanations of the parables are enigmatic and require careful study to reveal their meaning. But, at the heart of Jesus’ teaching is one simple invitation - to have the courage and commitment to keep searching until the truth finds us. It is only when we give up, or think we have “arrived” that we miss receiving God’s message.

How can you make time to search for more of God’s truth today?

Practice for Today: Jesus drew his parables from the world around him. In doing this, Jesus showed us that God’s truth is often revealed in unexpectedly ordinary ways. So, as much as we need to study the Bible to hear God’s word, we also need to study the places and people with whom we interact each day. Today, make time just to watch your world, and open your heart for any truth God may share with you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I open my heart and mind to your word, O God, as I gaze with wonder at my world.

Thursday 20 July 2017

Reading: Isaiah 44:1-5

Reflection: When Israel and Judah were conquered, the people felt abandoned by God. The prophets all agreed that the reason for this catastrophe was the injustice in the nation, the corruption among the leaders, and the general disobedience to God’s ways. Perhaps this is why the people fell into despair - if God had allowed this to

happen because of their rebellion, how could they ever expect God to forgive and restore them? Yet, even in their dark time, God continued to speak and often reassured the people that God would never cease to love them. Today’s reading is an example of God’s gracious words of comfort.

The words in this passage are powerful and deeply healing. Twice God refers to God’s people as God’s servant and God’s chosen. God reminds the people that God is their creator and helper, and then God promises to bring them water for their fields and bodies, and the Spirit to fill their souls. Even though they had experienced great devastation, God assures the people that they will thrive, and will once again know that they belong to God. So secure will the people be that they will proudly declare their commitment to God and will even write it on their hands.

It is usually in our toughest times that we need to be reminded of God’s presence and God’s commitment to us. It is also in these times that we most need to reaffirm that we belong to God, and consciously to remind ourselves that God is with us. But, even in good times, we need to remember that we belong to God. How can you actively remember God’s love for you today?

Practice for Today: The practice of journalling is a wonderful tool of remembering. When we take the time to write our experiences of God’s presence and love, our faith is strengthened, and we find the comfort and reassurance to face life’s challenges. Whether you’re going through good times or bad, make time to journal and remember God’s presence and promise today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I remember that there is nothing that can separate me from your love, O God, and I celebrate that I belong to you.

Friday 21 July 2017

Reading: Hebrews 6:13-20

Reflection: So often, when God’s word seems to fail us, we blame God. It is common to hear people ask how God could possibly be good and allow such poverty, violence, and pain in our world. Yet, God has shown us how to live in such a way that poverty, violence,

and suffering could be eradicated across the globe. So the question is not why God allows these things, but why we do! The truth is, as the writer in today's passage explains, God's word is reliable. God has given us both a promise, and an oath on God's own name to guarantee that God's words can be trusted. But, the timing and way in which God's promises are fulfilled are not ours to determine. The writer, using Abraham as an example, mentions that Abraham received what God had promised. Yet, in Hebrews 11:39 he says that some of our faith ancestors did not receive what was promised. This means that, although God's promise is always fulfilled, we don't always see the fulfilment ourselves.

As the parables of God's Reign declare, though, our problem is not making sure that God is faithful, but that we are. It is up to us to receive the word and to implement it in our lives. It is up to us to bear fruit, and to follow the way of Jesus more faithfully each day. The certainty of God's word gives us hope and security to endure whatever struggles we may face, but our task is to allow God's word to shape our values, our priorities, our habits, and our whole lives in such a way that we bring life and wholeness to others.

How can you strengthen your faithfulness to God's word today?

Practice for Today: One of the ways we can remind ourselves of God's faithfulness is through the practice of thanksgiving. When we give thanks, we remember what God has done, not just to "bless" us, but to carry us through times of struggle. Today, allow your thanksgiving to strengthen your experience of God's faithfulness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that even when I am not faithful, you remain faithful always.

Saturday 22 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 7:15-20

Reflection: Tomorrow's Gospel reading relates the parable of the wheat field into which the farmer's enemy sowed weeds. But, the farmer allowed the wheat and the weeds to grow together, so that no wheat was destroyed by accident. This parable explains a simple truth about our world - good and bad live side by side, not just in our neighbourhoods, but even in our own hearts. This, of course, raises

the question of how we can know what is good and what is not. Today's reading gives a simple guide - we can know by the fruit that is produced. Good trees don't produce bad fruit, and bad trees don't produce good fruit. And, ultimately bad fruit is destroyed - it cannot last, and its effects end up coming to nothing.

Most of us love to use passages like this to judge others. We love to examine the fruit of others, and treat them with grace or rejection based on whether we think they have produced good fruit or not. But, the real challenge of this passage is to search our own hearts and lives and determine the nature of the fruit which we are producing. If we're honest, we will probably identify some fruit that is good and some that is bad - which means that parts of our lives are "bad trees" and parts are good. Then, we need to deal with the bad, and nurture the good.

What good fruit are you producing? And what bad fruit are you producing? How can you nurture the good in your life today?

Practice for Today: The Ignatian practice of examen, in which we search our lives and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the good and bad in our hearts, is a good way to measure the truth about our lives. And as we see where we stand, we are able to do the work to produce more good fruit, and reduce the bad. Today, make time to spend time in Spirit-guided examination of your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Guide me, O Spirit, to nurture the good fruit in my life, and remove the bad.

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