

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

23 - 29 July 2017

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

Where do you place your hope? If we view the world through the lens of our society's values and goals, we probably hope for quick resolutions to the problems that plague us most. We make easy judgements about what we consider good and bad, and we seek to have the bad eradicated as swiftly as possible. We may even place our hope in those leaders whom we believe will most quickly and easily shape the world according to our view of how it should be - which view is usually itself shaped by the images of a perfect world that are constantly offered to us in the media.

But, this week the Scriptures offers us two words of caution and of hope. The first is that the world is on a purposeful course toward the dream of God for the wholeness and unity of all things. The second is for us to acknowledge that our view of good and bad is often limited, and so we need to wait patiently, trust in God, and allow God to work out God's purposes according God's eternal timeline.

This week we explore what it means to build our lives on these foundational truths.

### **Sunday 23 July 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

**Reflection:** We like to make judgement calls, quickly identifying and destroying what we consider to be evil, but the parable of the wheat and the weeds reminds us that we do not always see clearly. We often destroy what is good in our quest to eradicate what is bad. This means that we need to release our need for clear lines between good and bad. We need to release our need to judge and separate ourselves from those whom we consider to be less than good. We need to learn to hold our ideas lightly, and wait until we see the full fruit of a particular person or situation. And, we need to learn to trust God's grace and justice, finding our peace in the knowledge that God will deal with what is bad in God's time, and in God's way.

But, this parable also has another word for us. It is a call for us to be aware of our own dual nature. While we seek to follow Christ with everything we have, we all have places within our own hearts that are rather more like weeds than wheat. We all have moments when our worst selves take control, and when we bring destruction on ourselves and others. Sometimes we can't even be sure of what the good fruit or the bad fruit within us really is. So, we need to be compassionate with ourselves, acknowledge our own need for God's grace, and give God's Spirit the time to transform and us and bring us to wholeness in God's time. It is God who begins the work in us, and it is God who must complete it (Philippians 1:6).

Where do you need to release your need to make judgement calls about others or about yourself today?

**Practice for Today:** We often think that God makes strong and frequent judgement calls about us, but our worship practice would indicate otherwise. The practice of confession is designed to enable us to open the truth of our lives to God. But, it is always followed by a word of absolution, of cleansing and forgiveness. This means that God is less concerned about judgement than about wholeness. Today, receive God's absolution for yourself, and seek to be quick to absolve those around you when necessary.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, O God, for graciously drawing me to wholeness, and empowering me to forgive others.

### **Monday 24 July 2017**

**Reading:** Genesis 32:3-21

**Reflection:** From the beginning of his life, Jacob was a trickster, even going so far as to deceive his father and steal the blessing which should have been reserved for his older brother, Esau. As a result of Esau's anger, Jacob fled to the land where his uncle's family lived. Here he worked, married, and, again through trickery, grew quite wealthy. Finally, he felt a prompting to return to his homeland. But, of course he was worried about how his brother would receive him. It seems that it was this fear that drove him into the famous wrestling match with God in which he gained a limp, and a new name. It was also this fear the caused him to use gifts to try to win his brother over - which ended up being completely

unnecessary, because Esau was ready to forgive. Strangely, though, Jacob seems not to have changed completely. After meeting Esau and receiving his forgiveness, Jacob promised to meet Esau at one town. But, then he went off and settled somewhere completely different! And this is the man whom God used to found the nation of Israel!

Most of us, if we did not know the end of Jacob's story, and that of the people who were his descendants, would write Jacob off as a dishonest, selfish and self-protective sinner. But, this is not what God did. Even though God knew about Jacob's deceptions, he saw, amidst the weeds of dishonesty, a heart that was devoted to God, and that would be able to contribute to God's purposes. Now, when we think of Jacob, we don't focus on his lies, but on his position as one of the patriarchs of Israel. If God could work with both the wheat and the weeds in Jacob's life, surely God can do the same with us?

Where do you see God working in your life today - even though you may not feel qualified or worthy?

**Practice for Today:** It seems amazing that, in spite of his compulsive dishonesty, Jacob continued to pray in earnest, and gave God credit for all the goodness he and his family enjoyed. Jacob's attitude of thanksgiving and trust were the wheat that could not be overcome by the weeds in his heart. Today, allow your thankfulness to overcome whatever weeds you may be dealing with.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you, God, for loving me and using me, even though I still fail to live up to my best self.

## **Tuesday 25 July 2017**

**Reading:** Galatians 4:21-5:1

**Reflection:** Writing to the Galatian church, Paul needed to base his arguments in Scripture. The church had come under the influence of a group of believers who claimed that everyone, including the Gentile converts to the way of Jesus, had to obey the law to be acceptable to God. So, the apostle returned to the very origins of the Jewish faith, and used the example of Abraham's two sons to make his case. One son, Ishmael, was the result of human effort, and was not the one chosen to be the foundation of Israel. The other son, Isaac, was the result of divine action, and was chosen for God's

purposes. Paul then used these two boys as allegories to represent the law and God's promise. His point was that the law does not achieve what God desires. Only the work of the Spirit fulfilling God's promise can do that. As believers in Jesus our faith is based not on human effort, but on the work of the Spirit and the promise of God.

Legalism has always been a temptation for people of faith. When we successfully tick all the boxes of the law, we can feel proud and special for our achievement. But, we inevitably begin to look down on those who have not obeyed the rules as we have. The truth is that no amount of rule-keeping can ever make us acceptable to God. It is only God's gracious acceptance of us that gives us any place in God's family. So, when we use the law to exclude others we also exclude ourselves. It can be very hard to root out the weeds of legalism from our hearts and fall into the pure grace of God.

Where are the weeds of legalism growing in your heart? How can you root them out today?

**Practice for Today:** When we make time to remember and praise God for God's grace, we are freed from the temptation to be legalistic and judgemental because God's presence and love become real for us. Today, allow your praises to remind you of God's gracious acceptance, not just of you, but of those around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your infinite and all-embracing grace.

## **Wednesday 26 July 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 75

**Reflection:** Today's Psalm reflects the message of the parable of the wheat and the weeds from a different perspective. The Psalmist affirms that it is God alone who can judge between the 'godly' and the 'wicked'. But, God's judgement does not come out of nowhere. The Psalmist describes God as warning those who "raise their fists in defiance at the heavens". Those who refuse to listen to God's wisdom and who will not embrace God's life-giving ways ultimately bring destruction on themselves and others, but this is not what God desires. So, God always speaks some word of caution. Eventually, though, we all have to face the consequences of our choices, and reap the results of our actions and attitudes.

It can be tempting to view God's warnings, and the time of facing consequences (what the Bible calls God's judgement) as a weapon we can use against those who disagree with or hurt us. It can also be tempting to think of ourselves as wholly good and on God's side, while our opponents are wholly bad and against God. But, this is seldom the case. As we have already seen this week, we are all a mix of good and bad, and we all need to be guided by God's wisdom. This means that we need to stay humble in our dealings with others, and leave the final reckoning to God. For now, it is enough for us to follow the Psalmist's example, proclaim what God has done, and praise God for God's grace and goodness.

How can you allow God's wisdom to be seen in your life as you humbly praise God and proclaim God's ways today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes we may think that we proclaim God's wisdom and ways by correcting and condemning what we consider to be the bad actions of others. But, this is seldom received as a proclamation of the Gospel. Rather it comes across as human anger and unkindness. But, when we humbly follow God's ways, welcoming others, and sharing our stories as we are given opportunity, then God's grace and glory shine through. Today, allow your humility and friendliness to be the way you proclaim your faith.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I walk humbly with you, O God, and share kindness with others, may they see your goodness in me.

#### **Thursday 27 July 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 4:14-20

**Reflection:** The Corinthians were a passionate and difficult lot. Within the church were leaders who claimed that Paul was not a true apostle, and that they were the ones the people should follow. As a result the church was splitting into factions, each following a different leader. To push their advantage some of the leaders were claiming that Paul did not care for the Corinthian believers and that he would not return to visit them and follow up on his work. But, the apostle did care for this community - like a father who loves and protects his children. Which meant that he was not afraid to challenge and discipline them when necessary, in order to guide them in God's ways. That's why he sent his faithful friend, Timothy, and promised

to return as soon as he was able. But, he was hoping that his letter, and Timothy's ministry, would be enough to resolve the issues so that when he did visit, he would be able to celebrate with this community, and not confront them.

Paul's ministry was founded on a simple, but profound belief - that God's Reign is not about what we say, but about how we live. Talk is easy, but it is only in the power of God's Spirit that we can become the humble, loving, justice-seeking people God has called us to be. And it is these marks of the Spirit's work that Paul wanted to see in the lives of the leaders of the Corinthians. It is also these marks in our lives that will show that we are followers of Jesus, and that will contribute to making God's Reign a reality in our world.

Where have you allowed your faith to be only words? Where is the power of the Spirit at work in you? How can you receive more of the Spirit's power today?

**Practice for Today:** Once we have recognised that following Jesus is not just about saying the right words, we quickly realise that we need God's power to live the Jesus way. That's why it is so good to know that God's Holy Spirit is always available to us. As you seek to live according to Jesus' values today, carry a prayer of invocation with you and invite the Spirit to empower you in each moment.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Empower me, Holy Spirit, so that my faith is expressed not just in words, but in Christlike actions.

#### **Friday 28 July 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 119:129-136

**Reflection:** The writer of Psalm 119 recognised that God's instructions were intended to show the best way for human beings to live, and so he delighted in the law. While legalism views the law as a harsh and cold set of rules which must be obeyed for fear of punishment, the Psalmist saw the law as a treasure map that showed the way to a life of wholeness, connection with others, and intimacy with God. This is why he celebrated God's commands, and prayed passionately for God to empower him to obey them.

There are a number of specific requests that this writer lays out before God, all of which are intended to help him to follow God's

ways. He asks for God's mercy and guidance. He seeks to be freed from the oppression of others so that nothing can prevent him from being obedient. And he pleads for God's love to continue to teach him. Finally, he grieves for those who fail to value and follow God's instructions, because he knows that they deprive themselves of the wisdom that leads to abundant life.

Two significant truths stand out in these prayers. The first is that obedience to God's ways is not about legalistic striving. It is about living in a liberating relationship with God in which God teaches us and empowers us to live our best lives. The second truth is that the primary teacher is love. God is love, and so it is love that must lead us into God's ways, and that ultimately fulfils all the laws requirements.

How can you delight in God's law today, and allow love to teach you to obey it?

**Practice for Today:** Since obedience is less about jumping through legalistic hoops, and more about living in loving relationship with God, the best way to learn to obey God's law is to spend time in communion with God. This is why all spiritual traditions encourage meditation. As we spend time in stillness with God, not asking for anything or seeking to achieve anything, we grow more aware of God's heart, and we are naturally motivated to live in ways that please God. Make time to meditate on God's love and life today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I meditate on your love, O God, so you show me what you desire and empower me to do it.

### **Saturday 29 July 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Kings 2:1-4

**Reflection:** It was not a guaranteed thing that Solomon would be David's successor as king of Israel. As David grew more frail, so the inevitable power struggles and political games began to play out. But, David had not lost his ability to navigate these storms and he ensured that Solomon did become king with a surprising lack of violence. Once Solomon's position was secure, David gave his last instructions to his son. He reminded the new king of God's promise to keep one of David's descendants on the throne, and he called Solomon to obey God's commands. It's interesting that this

obedience is connected with David's instruction that Solomon should "be a man". Clearly, true masculinity for David was not about dominating others, or winning wars. It was about living in union with God and in compassionate service of others.

In our world, both men and women face the temptation to seek power, wealth and self-gratification above all else. We are constantly encouraged to put ourselves first and to claim our power for our own personal benefit. But, this individualistic quest for personal happiness and security seldom delivers what it promises. We need a new understanding of what it means to be fully human. The Bible makes the audacious claim that we find our best lives not when we put our own needs and desires first, but when we seek to bring joy and justice to others. David's challenge to Solomon remains true for us today - when we follow God's ways, and live in love, that's when we discover what it really means to "be a man" or "be a woman". This is the basic, and constantly-repeated, message of the Scriptures. But, it's a message we need to hear again and again, because it is not easy to learn to live this way.

How can you release your tendency to put yourself first today, and find ways to love those around you a little more?

**Practice for Today:** To follow God's ways and experience God's life for ourselves, we need a constant practice of studying the Bible and then trying to do what we read. As we build our lives around the discipline of learning God's ways and applying them in our own situation, so we learn to live up to our best selves, and our lives begin to be a positive influence in our small corner of the world. Make time today to read the Bible and apply what you learn.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Help me, O God, to learn your ways and to follow them each day.

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