

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

30 July - 05 August 2017

Thought for the Week:

The word 'obedience' carries a lot of baggage for many of us. We may remember harsh teachers, parents or ministers who threatened us with pain and rejection unless we complied with the letter of their law. We may feel that any call to obedience robs us of our independence and individuality, and we may want to resist conforming or being part of what feels like a system of control. But, there's a reason that the old hymn connected obeying with trusting. When we feel that the law and those who uphold it are not trustworthy, we will always struggle with obedience. But, when we trust that the call to obedience is an invitation to live in ways that are in our best interests, we will comply far more easily.

The Bible makes no apology for calling us to obey God's call. The way of Jesus is not the easiest path to follow, and living by the values and priorities of Jesus is often painful. But, the values and priorities of our world are clearly not working for all but a few, and we need a new way to be – a way that leads us into sharing with, caring for, and connecting with one another more deeply. This new way is what Jesus called the Reign of God, and obedience to this way leads us all into the best life possible for human beings.

This week we explore again the call – the invitation – to obey the ways of God's Reign.

Sunday 30 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Reflection: Jesus represents God's Reign through things that are seemingly small and insignificant, yet have great impact on the world. Tiny mustard seeds become homes for birds, and a pinch of yeast fills an entire batch of dough. Similarly, Jesus uses hidden things to describe God's Reign – hidden treasures and rare pearls. But, for those who discover these hidden treasures, no price is too high to attain them. Finally, God's Reign is seen as drawing people

to it, like a fishing net. For some the cost will be too high and they will not embrace it. But, for those who do accept the call there is a world of new experiences and insights, and a connection with the ancient truths and community of God – treasures old and new.

The invitation of Jesus, then, is to join him on a quest to become part of God's new way. It is the way of small actions and attitudes that leave a lasting mark on the world. It is the way of hidden treasures, and of refusing to settle for the cheap and easy pleasures that our society calls life. It is the way of being willing to pay the price of being part of God's life and God's saving purpose. And it is the way of honouring ancient wisdom, while celebrating new expressions and experiences of it.

How do these parables of the Reign of God challenge and inspire you today?

Practice for Today: A thread that runs through almost all of Jesus' teaching about the Reign of God is that it requires great commitment to do the work and pay the price to really attain it. This is because God's way is contrary to a lot of the values and priorities of our society. This is why we need to make a daily commitment to find the signs of God's Reign and to live in such a way that we become part of what God is doing in our world. Today renew your commitment to search for small, hidden signs of God's Reign in your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Whatever the cost, Jesus, I will gladly pay it to attain the hidden treasure of your Reign.

Monday 31 July 2017

Reading: 1 Kings 3:16-28

Reflection: The famous story of Solomon's wise strategy for discerning the true mother of a baby that was claimed by two women follows immediately after a mysterious interaction in which God offered to give the new king whatever he wanted. Solomon obviously took his role as king seriously, and knew what he would need to rule well, and so he asked for wisdom, which God promised to give him. Today's reading is meant to reveal that God had kept God's promise and filled Solomon with a rare wisdom.

It has become a bit of a cliché to say that when God calls us God also equips us, but it is the truth. Sometimes, when we hear the call to follow Jesus' life-giving way, and when we're faced with the cost of obedience, we may feel that we don't have the capacity to do what is asked of us. We may strive in our own strength to be what God wants us to be, and we may grow angry with ourselves when we fail to be our best selves. But, God's call is not meant to place a great burden on us. Jesus proclaimed that his burden is light, and we find rest in him. So, the paradox of obedience is this: God asks us for everything, but if we can find the courage and faith to respond, God gives us the strength, wisdom, faith, courage and love that we need to live Jesus' way.

What do you need to follow Jesus faithfully today? How can you open yourself to receive it from the God who calls you?

Practice for Today: It is never wrong to ask God for what we need in order to answer God's call. This is why the Bible constantly encourages us to pray for ourselves, as well as for others. When we bring our needs and requests to God, we open ourselves to receive what we need in order to follow Jesus as faithfully as possible. Today, boldly ask God for whatever you need to live Jesus' way.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I seek to answer your call, O God, please give me all that I need to be faithful.

Tuesday 01 August 2017

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18

Reflection: In his last words to the Christ-followers in Ephesus, the writer of this letter draws their attention to the evil forces in the world. He calls God's people to prepare themselves to resist the influence of the demonic by protecting their hearts and minds, their commitment to proclaim Christ's message, and their faith in God's grace and life. All of these metaphorical pieces of armour are intended to remind the believers of their place in God's family, and of the Spirit's presence and power in their lives.

It is tempting to use this passage to justify a kind of spiritual warfare that fights the evil "out there" and ignores the evil in our own hearts. While we are certainly called to stand against any system or circumstance that oppresses, marginalises, or harms any human

being, we cannot really fight the evil in the world until we have faced the demonic tendencies within us. In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, the writer addresses the issues of the heart – living together as intimate partners, as families, as co-workers, and as positive influences in the world. This is, perhaps, the hardest part of the work of obedience. We need God's armour as much to protect ourselves from the "principalities and powers" within us as from those outside of us.

What attitudes and desires of your own heart are drawing you away from God's life today? How can you put on God's armour to resist your worst and embrace your best?

Practice for Today: Until we are willing to acknowledge what is broken and needs to change within us, we cannot become our best selves. This is why we need a regular practice of confession. We need to face and resist the evil within us in order to allow the good to grow and expand. Today make time for confession, and invite God's Spirit to help you be honest about what needs to change in you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I recognise the evil that seeks to work in me, O God, and in your strength I resist it.

Wednesday 02 August 2017

Reading: Mark 4:30-34

Reflection: The beginning of today's reading echoes one of the parables from Sunday – the mustard seed. The writer of Mark's Gospel notes that Jesus used a number of other similar stories to illustrate God's Reign. Clearly Jesus really wanted to drive home the point that the Reign of God works completely differently from human empires. Where human systems of power and wealth make a show of their presence and influence, God's Reign works in small hidden places. It's good to be regularly reminded of this, because we can easily fall into the temptation of embracing the world's values, while claiming the name of Jesus. We need to constantly measure our methods and goals against the quiet secrecy of God's Reign.

But, the point of today's reading is not the specific parable. It is to stress that Jesus used parables as his primary way of teaching the people. Even Jesus' own methods were hidden, mysterious and easy to miss. In fact, the disciples were so confused by this that they

questioned Jesus about it. They thought he should be making his message much clearer and easier to understand. But, Jesus knew that discipleship is a quest. To embrace the difficult journey of learning to discover and live God's Reign is to be part of God's Reign already. God's Reign is not a destination, it is a way of traveling through life - a way of constant searching, learning, changing and growing into our best, most Christ-like, selves.

How can you make your faith more about the journey and less about a destination today?

Practice for Today: While it may not often be taught as a spiritual discipline, Jesus certainly encouraged his followers to ask questions, and to constantly seek new ways of seeing the world and living in it. When our faith is all about answers, it easily becomes rigid and stagnant, and it is limited by the answers we already know. But, when we embrace the discipline of questioning, we open ourselves to growth and learning, and our faith is able to expand. Today, try to ask as many new questions as you can.

Breath-Prayer for Today: What do I need to learn about your Reign today, O God?

Thursday 03 August 2017

Reading: Philippians 4:10-15

Reflection: The letter to the Philippians was most likely written by Paul toward the end of his life. He wrote from prison, yet he wrote with great joy and encouragement for the believers. It seems that the Philippian Church had sent a financial gift of some kind to help Paul in a time of need. The apostle expressed gratitude for their care, and for the way they had always supported him. But, he also used the opportunity to remind his companions in faith that his trust was ultimately in God. Because of his faith, Paul was able to be content in all circumstances. This is one of the greatest and most valuable gifts of faith.

Nevertheless, Paul praised the Philippians for their compassion and practical service. He knew that their gift was a reflection of how their lives had grown to reflect the grace and love of Christ. They had become obedient disciples, and so giving was simply a natural response to their faith. If every follower of Jesus responded like this,

there would be few people who suffered from poverty or isolation in the Church. We would naturally seek to care for and support one another, avoiding the temptations to hoard what we have, or to become "free-loaders" who expect others to do everything for us.

How is God calling you to be obedient in giving generously for the sake of God's community of care and mutual support?

Practice for Today: The Bible's promise that it is more blessed to give than receive is often quoted, but the evidence of our world is that we don't really believe it. We give grudgingly, and get angry when we hear calls to give in church. But, God commands us to give for our own sakes. Only in learning to share what we have can we break our tendency to become addicted to our own greeds and desires. Giving is an act of obedience that is in our own best interests - as many generous people can testify. Make today a day of generous giving to others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I give out of the abundance I have received, O God, so I am set free and I build your Reign in my world.

Friday 04 August 2017

Reading: Isaiah 41:8-10

Reflection: When catastrophe struck the nation of Israel, the people naturally felt that God had either rejected or abandoned them. Certainly the leaders had been foolish in the way they had handled the powerful nations that threatened them, and this contributed to the final conquest of Israel. For years the prophets had been warning the people that their social, political and economic systems were corrupt and that this would bring disaster on the nation, but they had been mostly ignored. So, there was good reason for the people to view the disaster as God's punishment - in their view of the world, this made perfect sense. Yet, throughout the whole experience of national decline, conquest and exile, the prophets always included two messages alongside their words of judgement. Firstly, there was the affirmation that, no matter what the people did, or what happened to them, they would always be God's chosen ones. God would not reject or abandon God's people for any reason. Secondly, there was always a promise of restoration calling the

people to hold on to hope. Today's reading from Isaiah contains both of these words of comfort and promise.

These words are a clear indication that God's bias is never toward punishment, but always toward to salvation and healing. We may suffer as a consequence of our choices or the choices of others, but God does not actively harm us because we have done wrong. However, as we navigate the pain of this broken world, God promises to always be with us and to sustain us through every dark valley. When we speak about obedience, God's promise of love and hope is very important. When we face tough times, it is only our hope and our assurance of God's favour that give us the strength to remain faithful. If we can avoid falling into cynicism and negativity, and keep trusting that God will provide what we need to face the challenges of life, we will find a peace and hope that will guide us and enable us to find joy even in the darkest times.

How can you hold on to hope today?

Practice for Today: When life is tough, or when we worry about the trends and events in the world around us, praise may feel like the last thing we want to do. But, when we turn our focus to God and God's unfailing commitment to us, our hope and courage is renewed. This is one of the gifts of the practice of praise. Today, whenever you are confronted with the pain of the world, let your praises remind you of God's presence and the hope we have in Christ.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Even in the darkest times, O God, I praise you for your presence and your unfailing love.

Saturday 05 August 2017

Reading: Psalm 17:1-7,15

Reflection: The Gospel reading for tomorrow tells the story of the feeding of the five thousand. While on the surface this event was about giving food to hungry people, the Gospel writer also seeks to communicate much more than this. He seeks to show Jesus as the one who brings life to God's people in the wildernesses of the world. When there seems to be nothing that can sustain life, when all seems to be lost, Jesus provides food - nourishment, life - in abundance. The Psalmists of the Old Testament had experienced

this for themselves and often told of their experiences of God's grace and provision in their songs. This meant that whenever they faced difficult times, like the writer of today's Psalm, they had a wealth of memories to draw on to strengthen and comfort them. This is why the Psalmist could proclaim with confidence that God would respond to his prayers (see verse 6). When we have confidence in God's sustaining presence, we can handle whatever life may throw at us.

From the Psalmist's perspective, though, God's grace seems to be conditional. He stresses his innocence and righteousness, arguing that this is why God should answer him and let him see God's presence in his life. Many believers still relate to God in this way, but this is not how Jesus revealed God to us. God's love and grace are not given as rewards for good behaviour. Our goodness does not earn God's favour, but is a response to the grace we have already been given and which we can never earn. God's love and presence are available to every single person, regardless of who we are or what we've done. All we need to do is receive, and allow God's Spirit to work God's healing and transformation in our lives - to feed us with abundant life.

How can you open yourself a little more to God's grace and life today?

Practice for Today: The Psalmist approached God knowing that he would find satisfaction in God's presence (see verse 15). He didn't need anything other than God's grace and presence to sustain him, and so this is what he sought. The same is true for us, and it is often our thanksgiving that best reminds us of how we already experience God's love and care. Today, let your gratitude remind you of God's presence, and lead you into a deeper communion with God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I thank you, O God, that my life is always sustained by your presence and grace.

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