

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

01 - 07 October 2017

Thought for the Week:

Once we have found a source of strength, purpose and meaning, it can be tempting to try and regulate who gets to share it. When we experience God's life and presence in a certain way, it's fairly easy to believe that everyone needs to connect with God the same way we did. The problem with this view is that we can turn ourselves into gatekeepers for God's Reign, drawing lines between who is in and who is out. We may also miss the work of God when it comes to us in a new or unfamiliar way, or through an unexpected person.

It takes great humility and openness to accept that God meets us – and everyone else – where we are. God's grace is extravagantly and shockingly flexible, and it extends to everyone, no matter who they are or what they have done. If this is not the case, then we're not dealing with grace. The challenge, though, is that grace must always be received, and receiving God's grace is directly related to how willing we are to see God's grace at work in others - especially those we would naturally consider underserving. This is the problem with gatekeeping. It tries to close the door on others, and in doing so, it actually closes the door on us.

This week we seek to release our need to be gatekeepers, and open our hearts even more to this radical, all-encompassing grace of God.

Sunday 01 October 2017

Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

Reflection: Cleansing the Temple was an act that was expected of the Messiah. The idea was that, when God's divine Messenger appeared, he would restore the worship of Israel to its former truth and power. So, when Jesus overturned the tables and chased out the corrupt merchants, it was like making a public claim to be the Messiah. This is why the religious leaders confronted him about his authority. They wanted to know whether he really was claiming to be the Messiah. But, of course, if he had answered directly, they would

have used this against him. Jesus was wise enough to understand their agenda, and to turn the question back on them. In doing so, he revealed their resistance to God's work, and their fear of risking their lives and reputation on this new move of God.

But, then Jesus told a parable that showed how incredibly shocking God's grace really is. He revealed that it was not those who said or thought the right things that were experiencing God's Reign. It was those who embraced the new way of living and acting in the world. And it was the outcasts, the "sinners", the unclean people who were finding a way into God's new community. The religious leaders, who were invested in the status quo, were unable to respond to God's grace in this way, even though they spoke the right words.

Are there any places in your life where you're afraid of God's surprising grace? How can you open yourself to a new work of God, and also open yourself to those who are embracing it?

Practice for Today: God is always doing new things - even sometimes through familiar situations and traditions. The challenge is for us to be open to recognise where God's grace is at work. This requires us to cultivate the habit of listening - to others, to our world, and to our own hearts - for the whisper of God's Spirit. Today, try to listen carefully for where you might hear the Spirit of God speaking.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As your surprising grace comes to me, O God, teach me to listen and receive it.

Monday 02 October 2017

Reading: Philippians 1:3-14

Reflection: Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the most hopeful and joyful books in the Bible. It is remarkable, then, that it was written from a prison cell, and even more remarkable that the apostle was so positive about his imprisonment. The key is that he was not concerned with his own well-being, but with creating opportunities to invite others into God's grace and life. For Paul, being a prisoner meant that he had unique opportunities to inspire believers and touch those who were yet to come to faith. Even when he had every cause to be angry, and to allow this to turn him into a gatekeeper who sought to shut his captors out, he chose a different way – the way of Jesus.

As he wrote to the Philippian church, Paul gave thanks for their faith and their faithfulness in partnership with him. But, he did not encourage them to become spiritually arrogant. Instead he invited them to go deeper into God's grace, and to keep learning and growing in faith. He also reminded them that it was God's work that had connected them with Christ, and it was God's work that would continue to guide and sustain them. There was no reason for these believers to feel superior to others. Their whole lives were the result of grace. All they could do was continue to live in that grace so that others could discover the joy of grace through them.

How is God's grace at work in you today? How can you allow God's grace to flow through you to others?

Practice for Today: When we begin to grasp the extent to which our lives are rooted in grace, we cannot help but respond in thanksgiving. In fact, if we're not automatically thankful, we haven't really understood grace yet. But, as we fill our lives with thanksgiving, this response to grace inevitably touches and blesses those around us. Today, use every opportunity to give thanks for the grace you have received.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For the grace that sustains me and gives me life, O God, I thank you.

Tuesday 03 October 2017

Reading: Exodus 18:13-27

Reflection: The temptation to be gatekeepers of God's grace can manifest in very ordinary ways. In today's reading, Moses was doing his best to be faithful to the responsibility God had given him. But, by making himself the only one who could dispense God's wisdom and instruction he had unintentionally become a gatekeeper. The result was that he was overburdened and the people had to wait for hours to have their concerns heard. Thankfully Moses had a wise father-in-law, Jethro, who showed him that there was a better way - the way of trust in others, and in the grace of God.

While we may not be leaders who take on too much responsibility, we all have times when we feel indispensable. This can cause us to feel responsible for things that don't concern us, or it can lead us to question the value of the contributions of others. Alternatively, we

may feel that others are indispensable to us, and this can lead us to place unreasonable expectations on them. Either way, our tendency to act as gatekeepers, or to make gatekeepers of others, reveals our failure to trust that God's grace is perfectly capable of working in unexpected ways. God does not need us, or anyone else, to accomplish God's purposes. While God always uses people, God is the one who gets to choose which people to use at which time. Our job is just to cooperate with the unpredictable move of the Spirit, acting when guided to do so, and opening to God's grace through others when appropriate.

Where are you tempted to believe you are indispensable? Whom do you idolise as indispensable to you? How can you release the need to control God's grace like this and open to new, unexpected movements of God's Spirit today?

Practice for Today: The problem is not that we are tempted to be gatekeepers. The problem is that we too often try to justify our pride and fear instead of acknowledging it, confessing it, and allowing God's Spirit to change us. If we want to be open to God's surprising grace, we will need the practice of confession to free us from our rigid expectations and open our hearts to the unexpected. Today, whenever you are tempted to make yourself or someone else indispensable, confess it and release it.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Your grace, O God, does not depend on me or anyone.

Wednesday 04 October 2017

Reading: Matthew 9:2-8

Reflection: The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the gatekeepers of God's grace. They controlled the sacrificial system which was the only way through which the Israelites could find forgiveness and cleansing. In the minds of the religious teachers God was gracious only insofar as God had given the people a set of clear guidelines by which they could earn their place among God's chosen ones. But, beyond that, forgiveness was not given easily or lightly, and they were the ones who spoke for God. Therefore, for Jesus to declare forgiveness, without any act on the part of this paralysed man, was a slap in the face for the religious leaders. He

was undermining their authority, and he was claiming to speak for God, with no credentials that gave him the right to do so. But, Jesus was determined that both the leaders and the people should know that God had given him the right to forgive, and so he used the healing of the paralytic to prove it.

The miracle in this act was not just the physical healing. The real miracle was that, for the first time, God's grace was freely available. This man did nothing to earn either the forgiveness or the healing, but it was given to him anyway. Jesus did not require him to go "through the channels" or to perform the necessary sacrifices, but dared to suggest that God could forgive without any need for these things. Suddenly, the gatekeepers were out of business, and they didn't like it. It was from this point that opposition to Jesus really began to gain momentum.

It's easy for us to fall into the same temptation as the religious leaders. We may feel that people need to pray a certain prayer, or go to a certain church, to be "saved". Or we may feel forgiveness must be earned by living a good life. What would it take to let go of these ideas and to embrace the free and reckless grace of God?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to remember that we do not, and cannot, earn God's grace is to spend time in praise. When we meditate on who God is and what God is like, and when we express that in our praises, we can't help but see that God gives us grace freely and extravagantly. Today let your praises open your heart to God's abundant grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for a grace that cannot be earned, but is given so freely and abundantly.

Thursday 05 October 2017

Reading: Colossians 2:16-23

Reflection: There have always been those in the church who believe that they know "the way it should be done". These gatekeepers of God's grace will try to impose rules and requirements on everyone around them, and will become vindictive and judgemental if their rules are not obeyed. Some may even claim to have come to their "knowledge" through amazing spiritual experiences and revelations, and their instructions may appear wise

because of the great discipline and sacrifice they entail. The truth is that we all act like these gatekeepers at some point and over certain issues. But, what we forget is that we do not follow Jesus' way in order to receive grace. We receive grace in order to be enabled to live the Jesus way. Grace always comes first!

This is why the writer calls his readers back to Jesus as the focus and source of their faith. All we need is to be connected with Christ. Jesus holds God's people together, and Jesus nourishes us and transforms us into the people God calls us to be. Rules and restrictions are not what make us like Jesus. Only grace can do that. But, once we've truly experienced grace, we cannot help but produce fruit that blesses and liberates others. If we live by the law, we will impose the law on others, and will be people of reward and punishment. But, if we live by grace, we will share grace with others freely, and will become people of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

How can you focus your faith on connecting more deeply with Jesus today? And how can you trust God's grace to produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life?

Practice for Today: One of the ways we feel most closely connected to others is when we play. Also, because it so very creative, playfulness is one of the best antidotes to getting too rigid and legalistic in our faith. Today, try to be playful in prayer, in your dealings with others, and even in how you treat yourself.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Your grace, O God, calls me away from rigid legalism and into the playfulness of your Spirit.

Friday 06 October 2017

Reading: Philippians 2:14-18; 3:1-4a

Reflection: It may seem strange that Paul should give a list of instructions about how to live the Jesus way, and then he would say that we are not to rely on human effort. If we didn't know better, we might even think this was a contradiction. Paul was very clear that it is only God's grace that saves us - that makes us right with God and draws into God's Reign. That's why he got so angry with those who insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. These legalistic believers were turning faith into a set of rules rather than a

lived expression of love for God and neighbour. And rules can never heal us.

But, Paul's instructions were not about rules that had to be obeyed to be saved. They were the marks of a life that is directed by grace and love. Once God's grace has taken hold of us, we cannot help but be gracious toward those around us. This means opting out of the cynicism and complaining that comes so easily to us. It means allowing the light of Christ to shine through us, and it means being willing to give our lives for the sake of this grace-filled Reign of God. These marks could not be "manufactured" by us. They could never be turned into rules. But, whenever we see someone who radiates these qualities, we know that God's grace has been at work.

Where do you see the marks of grace in your own life? Where do you see them in those around you?

Practice for Today: God's grace is always at work, whether we see it or not. That's why it can be a helpful and healing practice to learn to recognise the signs of God's grace in our lives and our world. But, even the ability to see God at work is a gift of grace for which we need the Spirit's inspiration. Today, invite God's Spirit to be your guide and to show you the signs of grace in and around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Open my eyes, Holy Spirit, that I may see the grace that fills me and my world.

Saturday 07 October 2017

Reading: John 7:40-52

Reflection: In tomorrow's Gospel reading, Jesus tells a parable about tenant farmers who refused to give the appropriate share of the harvest to the farmer, even killing the farmer's son when he came to claim his father's share. Jesus applied this to the religious leaders who had been entrusted with God's "vineyard" but were using their position for their own benefit and were not caring for God's people. In today's reading the writer of John's Gospel gives us a glimpse into the minds of the religious leaders. Jesus had been teaching in the Temple during one of the sacred festivals of Israel. The people were so moved by his preaching that they began to suspect that he was the Messiah. But, the religious leaders were unimpressed by Jesus' credentials. He didn't come from where he

was supposed to (they obviously didn't know about his birth), and he didn't act like he was supposed to. So, their minds were made up - he couldn't be anything but an impostor.

It is probable that the religious leaders were not really evil men. They were trying to protect the people from false Messiahs, and from stirring up a rebellion against Rome that would not end well. But, their problem was that they refused to be open to the possibility that God was doing something new. And then, when others suggested that perhaps Jesus was sent by God, they mocked and marginalised them. Even when Nicodemus suggested a more moderate approach, they tried to shame him and shut him down. This is the problem with legalism - it becomes rigid, fixed and closed to any new possibilities. But, grace recognises that we can never put God in a box, and that our understanding of God is always limited. Grace is open to new possibilities, even when they come in unexpected ways. And even when we disagree, grace enables us to treat others with kindness, respect, and appreciation for our differences.

Where are you tempted to put God in a box? Where is your heart open to new, unexpected possibilities?

Practice for Today: The religious leaders used Scripture to support their views. But, they read Scripture with closed hearts and minds, unwilling to accept that they might have missed something or that there might be other ways of understanding what was written. But, for others, like the Gospel writers, the Scriptures were full of signs and prophecies that Jesus was God's surprising Messiah. Today, read the Scriptures with an open heart, ready to be surprised or changed by new insights.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Speak to me through the Scriptures, O God, and surprise me with your grace.

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