

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

15 - 21 October 2017

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

We love the Gospel's invitation. We love to hear that God loves us and welcomes us, and we love to know that grace is extended to cover our wrongdoing and brokenness. What we like less is the Gospel's confrontation of that which is destructive in our lives. We don't like to hear that we need to change to become our best selves. But, when it comes to other people, we may be tempted to reverse this trend. We may find ourselves emphasising the confrontation of the Gospel against the "sin" in those with whom we disagree, and we may feel offended by the idea that God would invite those whom we consider less than worthy to be part of God's family.

But, if we are to embrace the full Gospel that Jesus proclaimed and lived, we must be willing to accept both the gracious invitation of God, and the challenging confrontation of God. While God's invitation is offered freely to all, including those whom we would rather exclude, God's confrontation also comes to all. We need God's grace and love to experience the transforming power of the Spirit, and we need to be transformed to experience God's abundant life. Until we learn to be comfortable with both invitation and confrontation, we will be unable to make a real difference in the world, because we will either be naive about evil, or we will become legalistic and judgmental. And neither of these attitudes can bring the healing and change we need.

This week we open ourselves to God's gracious invitation, and to God's challenging confrontation.

### **Sunday 15 October 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 22:1-14

**Reflection:** Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet, as told in Matthew's Gospel, is surprising and enigmatic. On the one hand it tells a story of inclusion for the marginalised, but then it changes to a story of exclusion! I believe there are two keys to understand what

Jesus was trying to say. The first is that this is a parable about God's Reign. Those who had originally been invited to the wedding feast had other priorities, and so they rather rudely excused themselves. This refers to those who claim to follow Jesus, but refuse to embrace the values and priorities of God's Reign - service, simplicity, and self-giving. But, this does not stop God from inviting whoever will come to be part of God's new order. Inevitably, the ones who most easily respond to God's invitation are those who have the least investment in human systems - the marginalised and rejected.

Then we turn to the man who was thrown out for wearing the wrong clothes. The key words here are "wedding clothes". This man represents those who respond to God's invitation, but refuse to change their lives to conform to the values of God's Reign (who refuse to wear the "clothes" of the kingdom) - particularly those of grace, compassion, welcome, and justice. The message here is that we cannot really respond to God's invitation, unless we are willing to have our lives shaped to become like Jesus. God's grace does not imply approval of our injustice and lack of love. Rather, it challenges us to become as gracious toward others as God is toward us.

How can you respond to God's invitation today? And how can you make sure to wear the "clothes of the kingdom"?

**Practice for Today:** The first step in becoming part of God's Reign is to accept God's invitation, recognising that it is a call to a different kind of life. The second step is to extend the same gracious welcome to others. There is a sense, though, in which accepting God's invitation and extending it to others are two parts of one response. Today, celebrate God's invitation by extending a kind welcome to everyone you meet.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I accept your invitation to be part of your Reign, O God, and I share that invitation with others.

### **Monday 16 October 2017**

**Reading:** Jude 17-25

**Reflection:** The last words of today's reading from Jude's letter seem to support the popular attitude of "love the sinner, hate the sin". The problem is that this approach has tended to be

experienced more as “hate the sin, reject the sinner”. We struggle to separate people from their “sins”, and we “hate sin” without really considering what this means. The result is that we just end up looking like haters, rather than gracious followers of Jesus. So, what did the writer actually mean? The key is in the final words about sins that contaminate peoples’ lives. Our selfish, self-protective attitudes and actions bring great destruction on us and others, and this is what we are called to resist. Whenever we see people being oppressed, abused, or excluded because of the greed, arrogance, or ignorance of others, we are called to oppose these sins.

But, even as the writer challenges the church to confront those who create division and harm, he also calls the believers to show mercy, to build each other up, and to pray in the power of God’s Spirit. The challenge is to recognise that there will be “scoffers” who reject the way of grace, peace and justice, but not to allow them to stop us from living by the values of God’s Reign. While we may need to confront destructive behaviour in ourselves and in others, we are always to make grace, kindness, mercy and peace the basis for every interaction. And we are always to seek to invite others into the grace and healing of God.

How can you show mercy to those around you today, even as you resist anything that brings harm to others?

**Practice for Today:** One of the most gracious and merciful things we can do is to pray for others. This does not just apply to those who are being hurt, but also to those who cause the hurt. Prayer helps us to see deeper, and to avoid shallow responses which easily judge or reject others. It leads us to find the goodness in those for whom we pray, and to learn how to confront harmful behaviour with grace. This is why we also need to pray for ourselves. Today, let your prayers be filled with mercy.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I pray for others and for myself, O God, may your mercy flow through me.

## **Tuesday 17 October 2017**

**Reading:** Philippians 3:13-4:1

**Reflection:** Following Jesus is not about making a one-time decision and leaving it at that. Using the image of a marathon runner

who perseveres to complete the race, Paul encourages the believers to persevere in faith. Then he goes on to describe some of what that perseverance entails. It means that our behaviour must reflect the values and priorities of God’s Reign. It means that, through every interaction and experience, we need to have a heavenly perspective, focussed not on what is temporary, but on what is eternal. It means that we must hold on to our eternal hope in Christ, and it means that we must work on our relationships with one another to keep them strong and mutually supportive. The truth is that all of these things are related - our love for God and our hope in Christ naturally flow into a life of kingdom actions, which includes working to love and serve one another.

A key phrase in this section of Paul’s letter is this: “We are citizens of heaven.” This means here and now, as well as into eternity. We don’t wait to enter heaven. If we live within God’s presence and love, and if our lives reflect the values of God’s Reign, then we experience heaven now, and we discover that, whatever our nationality may be, our primary citizenship is not in any earthly country, but in God’s Reign. The problem comes, of course, when we place our citizenship of heaven second to the other kingdoms to which we belong - which is what the people Paul warned against were doing.

How can you live today as a citizen of heaven first and foremost?

**Practice for Today:** We tend to become what we focus on. When we focus our hearts and minds on God’s Reign, then the values and priorities of God’s Reign begin to take hold of us and shape us. Today, allow your praises to keep your focus on God and God’s heavenly kingdom.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your Reign of love and justice.

## **Wednesday 18 October 2017**

**Reading:** John 6:25-35

**Reflection:** Two statements stand out in Jesus’ teaching today. The first is that we are not to be so concerned about perishable things like food. Our energy should rather be spent seeking God’s Reign. This is one of those times when we may feel that Jesus’ teaching is

easier said than done. Poverty and unemployment are life and death issues, and it's very hard to concern ourselves with anything else when we're not sure how we will pay the bills. But, when we remember that God's Reign is not a personal thing related to life after death, but a present, shared reality in which we care for one another, it makes sense to make this our focus. When we make living God's reign our priority we will build relationships that support and sustain us through the lean times.

The second statement is that the only work God requires of us is to believe in Jesus. Remember that, for the biblical writers, believing was not about what ideas we hold in our heads, but about where we place our trust and how this is reflected in our lives. When we trust in Jesus, we also trust in the way of Jesus - the way of simplicity, service and self-giving. And, if we truly trust in this way of Jesus, it will shine through every facet of our lives.

How can you spend your energy seeking the eternal life of Christ today, and placing your trust in the way of Jesus?

**Practice for Today:** True seekers put great energy into locating and acquiring the treasure they seek. The same is true of seekers of God's Reign. The Bible has been given to us as a treasure map which leads us to God's Reign, if we will only pour over it, understand it, and follow its directions. Today allow your reading of Scripture to lead you deeper into God's Reign.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I search the Scriptures, O God, so I learn to trust in you and find your eternal life.

#### **Thursday 19 October 2017**

**Reading:** 3 John 9-12

**Reflection:** These few verses from the third letter of John tell a revealing story. On the one hand there is the power-hungry Diotrefes, who seeks to control everyone around him, including their acts of service, and who even speaks ill of the apostles. On the other hand there is the faithful Demetrius who, although we are not told why, is regarded highly by everyone including the apostles. The difference between these two Christ followers is not what they say, or, perhaps, even what they think. The difference is in what they do - particularly how they treat other people. As the writer explains, those

who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God.

It is sad that faith in Jesus has so often been reduced to a few ideas that must be accepted without question, while the impact of our lives on others, and on the world, has largely been ignored. While the Bible is clear that we are welcomed into God's Reign only through the grace of God, the Bible does not say that what we do is unimportant. On the contrary, our actions reveal the extent to which grace has taken hold of us. If we have truly received God's grace, that must result in us becoming more gracious. If we have truly received God's love, that must result in us becoming more loving.

How do your actions reveal the life of God today?

**Practice for Today:** Grace, love and faith are all attitudes that change how we behave toward others. When we live by the values of God's Reign, this will automatically be revealed in how we serve others and seek their best. Today, allow your relationship with Christ to be revealed in actions of loving service toward those around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I do good, O God, may my life prove that I am your child.

#### **Friday 20 October 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Peter 5:1-5

**Reflection:** Today's reading from the first letter of Peter repeats a refrain that we've heard many times from the Scriptures: "Serve each other in humility". The writer addresses the leaders who are to resist the temptation to use their position for their own gain, but to serve and nurture the people under their care. Then he addresses the "followers" who are to respect those in leadership. But, because all of these instructions are placed in the context of serving one another, there is no call for domination, or for viewing some people as more important or valuable than others. Rather, leadership and followership are both functions which we are all called to fulfill at different times, and which give us the opportunity to reflect the grace and compassion of Christ.

In the Gospel reading on Sunday we hear those famous words of Jesus: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

First and foremost this refers to where we give our hearts, because where our hearts are, we direct all of our energies and resources. This means that, as we seek to live the way of Jesus together with others, we are to give our hearts in service of one another, because as we do this, we serve Christ. Sometimes, as in the case of this writer confronting leaders who were tempted to use their position selfishly, we may have to challenge and confront one another gently and lovingly, and always with the intention of growing together into Christikeness. But, most often it will mean sharing kindness, encouragement and support with one another.

Who needs you to serve them in humility today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes the most profound acts are the simplest and most ordinary. When it comes to serving one another in humility, few things are as effective as encouragement. While there may be times when we need to address what is not good, most of the time our calling is nothing more or less than to cheer each other on, and express our appreciation and encouragement for one another. Today try to encourage those around you as much as you can.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** In kindness you serve and encourage me, O God, and I seek to do the same for those with whom I live, work and worship.

## **Saturday 21 October 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 14:1-12

**Reflection:** When we are unwilling to see the destructive attitudes and habits in our lives, we inevitably become even more destructive, and our brokenness brings great harm to others. This is what happened with King Herod, who was unwilling to hear John's warnings about his selfish, hedonistic lifestyle. Instead of reflecting on his life and exploring how he could change to become healthier and more whole, Herod simply silenced John, and ultimately executed him at the urging of his wife and daughter. The impact of Herod's evil brought great suffering to so many people, not just John and his disciples. But, it was all so unnecessary. If Herod had simply been humble enough to receive correction and make some changes, he could have brought so much life to so many, and he

would have found abundant life for himself.

Those who make the most positive impact on the world are not perfect people. They are simply people who are willing to reflect on their lives enough to change what is broken and hurtful within them. Usually these people have groups of friends around them who hold them accountable and who are honest enough to confront what needs to change. This willingness to work together with others to become more like Christ was at the heart of so many revival movements through history, including the Wesleyan movement. The principle hasn't changed. To find our best selves, we must be willing to address our worst, and to allow others to help us in this process.

How can be more self-reflective today? Who are you willing to allow to be a trusted partner in this work?

**Practice for Today:** It is not possible to grow into our best selves without some sort of reflective practice. It is important that we learn to recognise both our gifts and our brokenness. It is important that we learn to take responsibility for working a little each day to change what needs to change, and to strengthen what is good. Today, make time for some honest, soul-searching self-reflection.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Search me, O God, show me what must change, and strengthen what is good in me.

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