

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
22 – 28 October 2017

Thought for the Week:

As followers of Jesus who believe in the way of Jesus, it can be tempting to try and impose our view of the world and our standards of behaviour on others. Some branches of Christianity even try to infiltrate social and political structures in order to take them over for Jesus. But, when we do this, we mistake the kingdom of God for the kingdoms of this world, and we turn Jesus into another Caesar. Our task is not to win control over the systems of power in our world. Our job is to follow a completely different path, to embrace a completely different version of power, and to follow Christ in the midst of a world that does not yet manifest God's Reign to the full. And, while we hope and pray for the day when God's Reign is fully revealed in our world, we recognise that only God can bring this into being.

On a smaller scale, we also wrestle with the temptation to confuse God's kingdom with our own little kingdoms. We may seek to become Caesars over those around us, convinced that if they just did what we said they and we would be much happier. Or we may make certain people, ideas, or organisations like Caesars to us, following them with blind obedience. Even though we do need to make commitments to families, employers, and churches, our primary devotion is to God, and it is God's values and priorities that must take precedence even as we live in these other social groups. So, while we need to "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" we must always be careful to "give to God what belongs to God."

This week we meditate on what it means to live as citizens of God's Reign in Caesar's world.

Sunday 22 October 2017

Reading: Matthew 22:15-22

Reflection: When the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with their question about paying taxes, they thought there were only two possible answers. If Jesus had said it was wrong to pay taxes, they

could have informed the Roman authorities and had Jesus arrested for treason. If Jesus had said that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, they could have labelled him as a betrayer of God's people and discredited him as a prophet. But, they failed to see how their own corrupt hearts were being revealed in their game. Jesus saw through them, revealed their hypocrisy, and taught an important truth about following his way.

We may feel that we have to choose between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. Some may feel that all we can do is worship Jesus on Sundays and then live by the values and priorities of the world during the week. Others may feel that we need to limit our involvement with the world and its systems as much as possible, and retreat into a spiritual compound where we can follow a different way. Jesus invites us to try a third option, which is not a choice between God and the world, but an opportunity to allow our faith to interact with the world. In this third way, we live in society as good citizens and neighbours, and we fulfil our role in our chosen field. But, in all we do, and in every interaction with others, we seek to allow God's Reign to be expressed in the world through us.

How can you be fully present to the world in which you live while following Jesus' way in every situation and interaction today?

Practice for Today: When we separate our faith from our lives, we miss the signs of God's Reign in our homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods. This is why we need to practice mindfulness. When we learn to open to the signs of God's presence, we begin to notice all the ways God is at work in surprising places, and we are able to cooperate with God. Today, make time to meditate on God's presence and learn to be mindful in every moment.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I meditate on your presence, O God, so I begin to recognise the signs of your Reign in each moment.

Monday 23 October 2017

Reading: Daniel 3:1-18

Reflection: Today's reading is the preamble to the story of the three faithful servants of God who were thrown into the furnace for refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They were officials in the king's government, so they were comfortable with living their faith in

the midst of their society. They had not retreated into a spiritual enclave. But, they were not willing to water their faith down in order to avoid trouble or make others feel more comfortable. When they were challenged to worship an idol, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego gently, but firmly refused. They did not accuse or slander the king, and they did not threaten God's punishment. They accepted the consequences of their decision, and treated their potential executioners with respect. But, they had no certainty they would survive. In verse 18 they explained that even if God did not save them, they would rather die than worship the king's idol.

We all face times when our convictions are put to the test, and when the consequences of living by Jesus' values can be extremely painful for us. We may not be threatened with death, but we may face loss of a job, or of a friendship. We may lose our reputation, or even our families. The temptation when this happens is to get angry and vengeful toward those who have hurt us, or to bow to the pressure and betray our values. But, if we do this, we lose our souls, because we give up who we are for the sake of security.

Where are you being challenged to live by convictions that could make things more difficult for you? How can you stay strong as you face these temptations today?

Practice for Today: The gift of prayer is not, primarily, that it saves us from times of trial, but that it strengthens us to stay true to God and ourselves through the tough times. Today, pray for any situation where your conviction is being tested, remembering also to pray for those who may oppose you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As my commitment to you is tested, O God, strengthen me to remain true to you and to myself.

Tuesday 24 October 2017

Reading: Psalm 98

Reflection: If we are to live as citizens of God's Reign in the midst of the kingdoms of this world, we will need to nurture a particular way of seeing and understanding the world. As we watch the injustice and war, the corruption and suffering around us it can be tempting to fall into the cynicism and negativity of the people around us. But, we can only do this if we forget that God's Reign is at work

even in the most unlikely situations. When we forget that every crucifixion brings a resurrection, and that death does not have the last word, the world can be a depressing and fearful place in which to live. But, when we remember that God's presence fills every tiny corner of this planet, and that ultimately God's purposes will be fulfilled, we can find rest and confidence in our faith, and we can move through the world with great optimism.

This God-oriented view of the world is what inspired the Psalmists. They could express themselves in exuberant praise because they saw God's purposes filtering through all of history, and they experienced God's presence in every place. This is why, in today's reading, the writer calls all of creation to join in praise. He has recognised that God's wonderful works always win out over death and destruction, and he knows that nothing can separate him from God's love. Even though the world is not yet just and suffering remains, he has hope in the time when God will set all things to rights, and bring healing, unity and justice to the world. And so, with this hope in his heart, he praises God for what God is doing now, and for what God will do in the future.

How can you nurture this God-oriented view of the world in your life?

Practice for Today: Like the Psalmist in today's reading, our praises flow from our ability to recognise God's presence and purposes working in our world. But, praise also teaches us how to see the world in this God-oriented way. This is why we can, and should, praise God in all circumstances. Today, praise God in every situation and let your praises open your eyes to God's presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your Reign is at work even when I do not see it.

Wednesday 25 October 2017

Reading: Matthew 17:22-27

Reflection: Today's surprising reading gives us a wonderful glimpse into Jesus' heart and mind. In the first section we read that Jesus knew that he would be arrested and executed. He was not naive, and he knew what the result would be of preaching the message of God's Reign. But, in spite of this, when he was challenged about paying the Temple tax, Jesus made a plan to pay so that he didn't

offend the religious leaders - the very people who would end up having him killed! We might wonder why Jesus would be concerned about causing offense to his enemies, but he always sought to ensure that there would be no basis for the accusations that would come. The power in his death was that he never stooped to the level of his executioners, but treated everyone with grace and respect, and absorbed evil into himself.

The story of how Jesus acquired the money to pay the tax is mysterious and rather challenging. The writer of Matthew's Gospel constantly portrays Jesus as greater than the Old Testament prophets using images that resonate with the stories of these great preachers. We are constantly reminded of how God provided for God's people in Moses' time in miraculous ways, and how Elijah was miraculously fed by ravens. Here, the writer shows Jesus being provided for in a similar way, proving that Jesus is God's Messiah, and is truly the one who established God's Reign in the world. This miracle also shows that the Reign of God has authority over all aspects of our world - from nature and its creatures, to economic systems. Here we see Jesus working within the system, but in a way that reveals God's grace and care in a powerful way.

How can you follow Jesus' example of treating all others with respect, and of living the way of God's Reign in the midst of your world today?

Practice for Today: The story in today's reading reveals a simple but profound truth. Usually when we become angry or disrespectful toward others it's because we feel threatened or insecure. But, when we find our security and rest in God's Reign, we have no need for aggressive coping strategies. And one of the ways we can nurture our sense of security is through giving thanks for what we have. Today, allow your thanksgiving to remind you of God's care and presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, God, that in you I find the security I need.

Thursday 26 October 2017

Reading: Numbers 5:5-10

Reflection: As we turn our attention to this coming Sunday, we

have to keep in mind the Great Commandment, which is the focus of the Gospel reading. This resonates nicely with our focus on living as citizens of God's Reign, especially when we explore what happens when things go wrong. As much as we may desire to follow Jesus as fully as we can, there is still much in us that needs to be changed. We still get angry, bitter, selfish, jealous and hurtful. Notice how, in today's reading, any acts that we do to harm another person are considered to be a betrayal of God (verse 6). This is how personally God takes our conflicts with each other, and how seriously God seeks for us to love one another.

But, even though conflict and hurt is inevitable, this does not mean that we must just accept it and do nothing. Rather, we are given clear guidelines for making things right and restoring our relationships. We are to confess, pay restitution (beyond the damage we have done), and seek reconciliation. Even if the person we have harmed is no longer alive, we are to do the work of confession and repentance, paying the restitution to God, through the leaders of our faith community. In a world where self-protection and individualism often result in broken relationships where no reconciliation is sought, this commitment to making right what we have done wrong is prophetic, and it reveals God's Reign in the midst of this world.

Where do you need to do the work of reconciliation today?

Practice for Today: When conflict arises, it is tempting to point fingers and lay the blame wholly on the other person. However, conflicts seldom arise purely because of one person, and even if they do, blame can never bring healing. Only when we are willing to confess and make things right can we restore our relationships. (The one exception to this process is when there is abuse involved). Today, allow your practice of confession to bring restoration to any broken or strained relationships.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When my relationships break down, O God, I confess my part and seek to make things right.

Friday 27 October 2017

Reading: Deuteronomy 9:25-10:5

Reflection: It sounds strange to our ears to hear Moses speaking

about God wanting to destroy God's people. This is because, thankfully, Jesus has shown us a more complete and developed view of God than this fairly primitive version. But this story is told as part of the journey of the Israelites to receiving the Ten Commandments. In a world where gods were believed to be fickle and quick to destroy those who disobeyed them, the idea that God could be persuaded to save God's people by a mere human being, and then that God would give the people a list of commandments to guide their life as a nation, was very radical. But, the most amazing thing was that these commandments can all be summarised - as Jesus pointed out - in two simple instructions: love God and love others. The first few commandments are all about loving God, and the latter ones are all about loving our neighbours. The entire law is summed up in the call to love.

When we speak of living as citizens of God's Reign in the midst of the kingdoms of this world, the call to love is the basis for how we do this. When we seek to love, we automatically do our best to serve and be generous toward others. When we seek to love, we automatically turn away from selfish and self-protective values. When we seek to love, our attitudes, actions, and relationships automatically reflect the grace, compassion and self-giving of God's Reign. And when we live by love, our lives reveal a completely different way of being from that of the society around us.

How can you build your life on loving God and loving others today?

Practice for Today: One of the simplest ways to express love is in the act of giving. This doesn't have to be a financial gift. It can be a giving of our time, our attention, our listening, our affirmation, our support, our comfort, our hospitality, or any other resource we have that can bless those around us. Today, find every opportunity to love others by sharing a gift with them in some way.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me to love you, O God, and others with all my heart and life.

Saturday 28 October 2017

Reading: John 5:39-47

Reflection: The essential problem Jesus had with the religious leaders is expressed in verse 42 of today's reading. They did not

have God's love within them. They knew the Scriptures, and spent lots of time searching their sacred texts to find the secret to God's life. But, they were unable to see how the Scriptures pointed to a different kind of Messiah than the one they expected. Although Jesus was the one who could lead them to life, they refused to accept him, and even though they constantly turned to Moses as their guide for how to follow God's way, they ended up violating the very principles that Moses taught - principles of love, justice and hospitality. They had become so focussed on the letter of the law that they had missed the spirit of the law - love for God and others.

But, before we point fingers at the religious leaders, we need to ask whether Jesus could level the same challenge at us. It is too often Christians who are the first to point fingers at those who fail to obey God's law as we see it. It is too often Christians who are seen to judge and exclude others who believe or behave differently from what we expect. And as we focus on the letter of our law, we often miss the way Jesus comes to us through the least and most vulnerable. The challenge of the Gospel is that we learn to recognise Christ in the unexpected people and situations, and that we learn to love God by loving those whom God loves - especially the ones who are most in need.

How have you lost sight of Jesus by focussing on the letter of the law today?

Practice for Today: It is good for us to study the scriptures and seek for God's life in its pages. But, the Bible is not an end in itself. It is meant to point us to Jesus, and it is meant to teach us to live in the love of Christ for God and for others. Today, make time to read the Bible, and allow it to point you to a deeper connection with Jesus, and with those through whom he can be served.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I study Scripture, Jesus, reveal yourself to me, so I can recognise you in the faces of other people.

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