

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
29 October – 04 November 2017

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

When we speak about following Jesus, about working for justice, about being holy, and about becoming our best selves, we're really just speaking about one very simple thing - loving God with everything we are, and loving other people as we would love ourselves. Both Jesus and Paul declare that love is the summary and the fulfilment of the law. Perhaps this is why St. Augustine said "Love God and do what you want." The meaning, of course, is that actions of justice, holiness, and self-giving flow from a deep and authentic love for God. And if we really love God, we cannot help but love what God loves - which is the world and everyone and everything in it.

The Scriptures speak of love as the end of the law. When we have learned to love as Christ did, we have no need for law, because we will automatically seek the best for those around us, which means we will never do anything deliberately to hurt another person. This love is not just a warm feeling inside. It is a way of being and acting, no matter what we may feel.

This week we explore how the call to love fulfils everything God asks of us.

### **Sunday 29 October 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 22:34-46

**Reflection:** Today's reading is in two parts. The first is the familiar Great Commandment in which Jesus speaks of the most important commandment in two parts - loving God and loving others. Then he adds the challenging claim that the entire law and the prophets (the Bible as they knew it then) are based on these commandments. If we want to know what righteousness or holiness looks like, then this our answer - it looks like the love of Christ. If we want to know what sin is, this is also our answer - it is anything that stands in the way of Christlike love.

But, then Jesus goes on to speak about how the religious leaders understood the Messiah. When they replied that God's chosen one was the son of David, Jesus asked them why David called the Messiah Lord. This may seem like a silly word game that has no real relevance to anything. But, Jesus knew that the minds of the religious leaders would need to be opened to a new understanding of the Messiah. They had to see the Messiah not just as a prophet, but as God somehow present in a person. Only then could they accept him as the one who could forgive sins, and who could explain the truth about the law. Until they had received this new understanding, they would never really accept the Messiah because he would be too different from their expectations. And this is, of course, exactly what happened with Jesus. But, once we have acknowledged Jesus' divine nature, we can accept his claims - especially the one about love being the fulfilment of the law.

Are you able to accept love as the fulfilment of the law? If so, how can you live by the law of love today?

**Practice for Today:** The Bible always speaks of love in terms of what we do, rather than what we feel. Love is always expressed through actions of self-giving, service and compassion. Today, allow the love of Jesus to be expressed through you by serving those around you as well as you can.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May your love be expressed through me, Jesus, as I serve others in your name.

### **Monday 30 October 2017**

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25

**Reflection:** The two commandments that Jesus quoted as part of his Great Commandment both come from the book of Deuteronomy. Today we read the original passage in which the first part appeared - the call to love God. Notice how the commandment is given along with the call to make it a part of every facet of the lives of God's people. They are to teach it to their children, speak about it constantly, tie it to their hands (make it part of their work), wear it on their forehead (make it part of their thinking and attitudes), and they are to make it part of the structure of their homes. God's law of love is to filter through and direct every facet of the lives of God's people.

Notice also how the people are instructed to teach their children that these laws are part of what it means for Israel to be a free nation. Since they had been freed from the oppression of slavery, God's people were to live in such a way as to liberate others. They were to serve and care for one another, because this is the way they would be blessed - which means that the consequences of living this way would be beneficial for the nation as a whole and for all the individuals in it. This is the kind of blessing God longs for all of us to enjoy and share.

How can you make love for God and others the basis for every facet of your life today?

**Practice for Today:** As we grow to understand the depth of God's love for us, we begin to understand that God loves others with that same infinite love. And once we have grasped that truth, we can more easily love others practically and selflessly. When we make thanksgiving a practice, it reminds us constantly of God's love, which then sets this virtuous cycle in motion. Today allow your thanksgiving to lead you deeper into God's love.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I thank you, O God, for loving me infinitely, and for teaching and empowering me to love others.

### **Tuesday 31 October 2017**

**Reading:** James 2:14-26

**Reflection:** As Christians we believe that God's life is a gift given freely by grace alone, and received - experienced and enjoyed - through faith. There is nothing we can do to earn God's favour, or to achieve a place in God's Reign. This is the foundation on which we build our lives. But, as the writer of the letter of James makes clear in today's reading, our faith, must lead us to live in a certain way. As we have noted before, we do not live the Jesus way in order to earn God's grace. We live the Jesus way because we have already received God's grace, and we can do no other. When our lives are truly captured by something, and when we believe in something with our whole hearts, then our attitudes, actions and relationships are shaped by that thing. If you really want to know what someone believes, look at how they act. Watch how they treat others, how they spend their money, or how they respond to moments of stress.

Our true faith is always revealed in our actions.

The writer also gives a clear picture of the particular kinds of actions that reveal faith in Christ. It is not enough to say kind words, or to promise to pray for someone. Faith in Jesus includes those things, but it also leads to practical actions that bring healing, comfort, security, justice and belonging to others - especially the most vulnerable among us. The illustration of how we might deal with someone who has no clothing or food is a good one. If we are moved by the suffering of the world to serve others as best we can, this is a sign that our faith is real, and that love has really captured our hearts.

How is your faith being expressed in actions of love today?

**Practice for Today:** It may be a cliché to say that you cannot love without giving, but it is the truth. If we truly love those around us, we will naturally give of our time, talents and treasures to bless and serve them. Today take every opportunity to give of yourself to those around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** You have given me your love and life so freely, O God, and so I give myself for others.

### **Wednesday 01 November 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 19:16-22

**Reflection:** When we read a biblical story like the one in today's reading, we must be careful to avoid two extremes. On the one hand we might be tempted to turn this descriptive story into a prescriptive law, implying that every follower of Jesus must sell everything or be rejected by God. On the other hand we may ignore it as simply a story about a single person - after all Jesus didn't tell everyone to sell everything. Both of these extremes are unhelpful and obscure the value of this story, which has something to offer to all of us.

The man who came to Jesus wanted eternal life. Jesus' response could seem to say that we have to do certain actions in order to receive God's life - that we are saved by obeying a law of giving everything away. But, clearly even this, as noble as it is, does not guarantee that we become the kind of people that God wants us to be. This man was sincere in his desire to follow Jesus, but his wealth had too strong a grasp on him. Jesus obviously saw this and

so he challenged him on this aspect of his life. This is where the passage challenges us, too. Although God's life is freely given, for it to fill us and be expressed through us, we need to remove anything that blocks the flow of love in our lives. For this man it was his wealth. For us it may be our pride, or anger, or fear, or something else. The key is to identify these stumbling blocks, turn away from them, and embrace Christ's love and life as fully as we can. This is a lifelong task!

What blocks the flow of God's love in your life today?

**Practice for Today:** We all have attitudes, habits, or ideas that block the flow of God's love in and through us. This is why we need constantly to do the work of examination and confession. When we are willing to let God's Spirit reveal the things we need to release, we are able to identify these blockages and then accept the Spirit's power to help us overcome them. Today, allow the discipline of confession to release the flow of love in your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Holy Spirit, reveal any blockages to God's love in me, and help me to overcome them.

#### **Thursday 02 November 2017**

**Reading:** Romans 2:17-29

**Reflection:** As we speak about revealing our faith in action, the focus of this Sunday's Lectionary readings is an important element to focus on - integrity. When our words, actions and attitudes are in conflict with each other, we are divided within ourselves and our faith can never shine clearly through our lives. But, when we live with integrity, when our whole selves are one and undivided, that's when the grace, love and life of God shines most clearly through us to touch others. This is the heart of today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. The apostle challenges those who claim to follow the law, while breaking it in subtle ways. He also emphasises how the failure of God's people to live what they claim to believe has caused others to "blaspheme the name of God". Our lives often speak so loudly that people can't hear what we're saying!

Notice how strongly Paul feels about the need for integrity. A true Jew, he says, is not someone who is circumcised - who has obeyed the law outwardly only. Rather, a true Jew is one who seeks to live

by God's values and priorities, whose heart is aligned with God, and whose life reflects the character of God. He even goes so far as to say that uncircumcised Gentiles who "keep the law" - meaning who live in love by the Spirit's power - are more truly God's people than Jews who are circumcised but fail to live the Jesus way. Of course, this does not just apply to Jews, but to anyone who claims to be God's child. Just using Jesus' name does not make us true followers of Jesus, but only living with integrity by Jesus' values and priorities.

How united are your thoughts, words and actions with each other, and with the way of Jesus today?

**Practice for Today:** In order to nurture a life of love and integrity, we need to observe and imitate those who already live like this. Of course, Jesus is the primary example for us to follow, and we can observe his life in the pages of the Bible. This is why Bible study is so important. Today, make time to observe Christ's life by studying the Scriptures that point to him.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I observe your life, Jesus, teach me to live with integrity as you do.

#### **Friday 03 November 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 43

**Reflection:** An inherent part of the call to live in love is the call to live with integrity. We cannot claim to love God if we do not love God's truth. We cannot claim to love others if we seek to deceive or mislead them. This is why the Lectionary turns its focus to integrity this Sunday. In today's reading we read of how the lies of people have led the Psalmist into great distress. He feels abandoned by God and is filled with grief. Yet, he continues to trust in God as his safe haven. As he pleads for God's rescue, he asks for God to send out God's light and truth - the two things that cut through the confusion and darkness of deception. Then the writer affirms that it is God's light and truth that will lead him to God's altar - to the place of worship - where he will again give himself in praise to God. Even though his heart is discouraged, this hope gives him strength.

It is tempting in this context to think of God's truth as a set of ideas about the world, or about people, God and ourselves. But, here the Psalmist speaks of God's truth as an "influence" that leads him into

God's presence. It would not be too much of a stretch to associate God's light and truth, in this Psalm, with God's Spirit. This resonates with the New Testament in which both Christ and God's Spirit are referred to as light and truth. For followers of Jesus light and truth are found in a Person, not in propositions. This is important, because it leads us back to love. If we want to be guided by God's truth, we need to nurture a relationship of love with the One who is the truth - Jesus Christ. And as we grow closer to Jesus so our lives are shaped to become more "true" - more aligned with God's values and priorities.

How can you nurture your relationship with Jesus, the truth, today?

**Practice for Today:** The Psalmist in today's reading speaks of truth leading him to the place where he can praise God. But this also works in reverse. Our praises of God lead us deeper into relationship with God, where Jesus, the truth of God, can take hold of us even more. Today allow your love for God to lead you into praise, and allow your praises to lead you deeper into love for God.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, Jesus, for you are the light and the truth that guides my way.

### **Saturday 04 November 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 23:13-28

**Reflection:** The words of Jesus in the sermon we read today are quite startling and disturbing. This is not the gentle Jesus that we love. This is a Jesus who strongly and unflinchingly confronts the lack of integrity in Israel's leaders. It could not have been easy for these men to listen to this tirade, but remember that this comes immediately after the religious leaders had tried, in three different ways, to trick Jesus into discrediting himself. We would make a mistake, though, if we used this passage to justify attacking our enemies. Jesus' words were not intended to harm the religious leaders, to but to liberate them from the things that were oppressing them, and causing them to oppress others. Just after this passage Jesus prayed for Jerusalem because the corruption of God's people was setting the nation up for a destructive clash with the world's powers. Jesus longed for the leaders to turn from their wickedness and lead the people into faithful obedience to God's way, because

only this could save them

Notice, as Jesus challenged the lack of integrity in these leaders, that there were really only two things that Jesus was confronting. The first was that they had their priorities all wrong. They allowed oaths to be sworn on the gold in the temple and on the gifts on the altar (basically on the currency, the money, of the Temple), but not on the Temple and altar. This indicated that they valued worldly wealth and possessions above God. The second issue Jesus confronted was the cold legalism by which the leaders would tithe to the last herb leaf, but would ignore justice and mercy. They focussed on minor issues and left the major issues unaddressed. This is why Jesus called them whitewashed tombs, and filthy cups. Outwardly they looked pure, but inwardly their hearts were far from God and far from people.

Integrity, for Jesus, is all about loving God and loving others, not about following a strict set of rules. How can you live with Jesus' kind of integrity today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the reasons why the religious leaders loved their rules so much was that they could be followed outwardly as a show of "super-spirituality." But, they could also be used to exclude those who were not so meticulous. The alternative that Jesus calls us to is to prioritise kindness and the welcoming of others, over rules that keep some in and some out. Today, try to leave some of your rules aside and just welcome and be kind to the people around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Today I seek to have a clean heart as well as a clean life by loving you and others as best I can, O God.

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