

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
05 - 11 November 2017

Thought for the Week:

The emphasis in the Christ-following life is always on the work of God. It is God's mission that is important. It is God's Reign that determines the values and priorities of our lives. It is God's grace that enables us to be a part of what God is doing. It is God's love that draws into the way of Jesus, and it is God's life that flows into and through us. But this does not mean that we have no role to play. When we speak of "letting go and letting God" we too often think of sitting back and waiting for God to make things happen. Our only task, then, is to hold on to certain ideas that we believe are the key to experiencing God's presence and power. The problem with a passive faith like this is that it inevitably leads us into some degree of hypocrisy. While we may say and think certain things, the focus of action is all on God, and so we may find that our lives begin to drift subtly from the values that we claim to believe.

This is why integrity is such an important value in God's Reign. It is only when our thoughts, attitudes, feelings, values, priorities, words and behaviour all align that our lives truly reflect God's mission. And it is only when we live with integrity that we can really experience the fullness of God's life, because then we're not just passive observers, but active participants in what God is doing. When our faith embraces every part of our lives, including our actions, it becomes vibrant, creative and life-giving to all around us.

This week we seek to bring our ideas, attitudes, words and actions into one aligned whole.

Sunday 05 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Reflection: Jesus had no argument with the teaching of the religious leaders of his day. He recognised their authority as teachers of the Scriptures, and he encouraged his followers to listen carefully to what they said. But, Jesus did have a problem with the

way the religious leaders lived, because their proud and legalistic ways contradicted their teaching. Their position as religious leaders had brought them great status and influence and it had gone to their heads. So, they lived their lives on a stage, doing everything for show, and making it appear that they were more "spiritual" than others. Yet, their hearts had lost the humility and grace that characterised the Scriptures they taught. They had become divided people, and their hypocrisy was destroying them and their nation.

This is why Jesus encouraged his disciples to reject any power games, titles and hierarchies. It is not that Jesus denied the need for leaders. It is rather that Jesus saw leadership as a function, not a position. For Jesus all people are equal as sisters and brothers, and all are called to be servants to one another. Rather than seeking influence and status we are to seek humility and integrity - to let our gentle, self-giving lives speak far louder than our words, and for our words to align with what people see in our lives.

How can you embrace Jesus' way of humble integrity today?

Practice for Today: It is easy to use our experience, our age, our knowledge, our position, our wealth, or our force of personality to make others feel less, or to boost our egos. We may even do this without realising it, which is why we need the Spirit's help as we examine our hearts. Today, invite the Spirit to lead you in the discipline of self-reflection, and notice any time you make yourself feel good by placing yourself above others. Then confess it, and turn back to humble service.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Forgive me, O God, when I place myself above others, and teach me your humble integrity.

Monday 06 November 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Reflection: Our integrity is most tested when things get tough. It is easy to live the Jesus way when things are going well. But, when we meet with opposition, or we are called to make decisions that are uncomfortable or sacrificial, the temptation to compromise our convictions and choose an easier way gets much stronger. This was Paul's concern for the Thessalonian Christians. He had brought them to Christ, and had wanted to return to support and strengthen

them in their faith, but this had not been possible. So, he grew concerned that perhaps their struggles were taking a toll. But, when Timothy returned from visiting with these believers, and reported that their faith was strong, Paul was overjoyed. This is why he wrote the letter from which today's reading comes, and his purpose was to give them some simple tools that could help to keep them strong.

The first tool Paul offers may sound rather like anti-semitism. He speaks of "some Jews" who persecuted the church and who killed Jesus. But, Paul was himself a Jew, and he had persecuted Christians just as violently. He also knew that it was not all Jews who opposed the church. So, although there was hurt in his words, he also longed for his companions in Judaism to find a better way (See Romans). Paul used the reaction of these religious zealots as a warning to the Thessalonian believers. They were not to grow bitter or angry, or respond in kind. Rather, they were to see the error of such aggression and choose the way of the cross. Then Paul spoke of his pride and hope in the church. His encouragement was a gift to remind them that they were valued and valuable in God's mission. This affirmation would have gone a long way to keeping these humble believers faithful.

Who needs you to respond to their aggression with humble grace today? And who needs your encouragement to carry them through a tough time?

Practice for Today: Following Jesus with integrity must be seen in action, but our words are also important. When we express kindness, grace, forgiveness and encouragement to others, we build them up and give them the strength to face life's challenges. Today use your words to affirm and encourage others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May the words I speak be encouraging and life-giving to everyone I meet, O God.

Tuesday 07 November 2017

Reading: Acts 13:1-12

Reflection: Right from the start of Paul's ministry he encountered opposition. In today's reading his struggle is with a sorcerer, Elymas, who managed to get himself into a position of influence and privilege. Paul's message was a threat to this man's position and so

he stood against it. But, although he claimed to be serving the governor, he was actually serving his own self interest. This is why Paul challenged his deceitfulness. The blindness with which this man was struck is really symbolic of a deeper blindness. As the old saying goes, "There's none so blind as those who will not see." Because he refused to see the truth of Paul's message, and sought to deceive others, the result was that his own "sight" was darkened, and he found himself unable to see, to understand, or to recognise the truth. Whatever happened to his eyes, the more important blindness was the confusion and lack of integrity in his soul.

When our thoughts, words, attitudes and actions are in conflict with one another, it is almost impossible to see clearly. We lose sight of our own best self. We lose insight into the motivations and character of others. We lose sight of God's presence and purpose. The resulting confusion often leads to brokenness within us and in our relationships. But, when we live with integrity, we see ourselves, God and others more clearly. We have a clearer sense of who we are and what we are to do, and the result is a growing sense of wholeness and connection.

How are you experiencing greater clarity through living with integrity? Where in your life does this need to grow?

Practice for Today: When we study the Scriptures we are being drawn deeper into God's truth and we learn to see things from God's perspective. This inevitably leads us to live with greater integrity. Today allow your study of the Bible to open your eyes and help you to see, and live, with greater clarity.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me your truth, O God, and let it guide my seeing and my living.

Wednesday 08 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 15:1-9

Reflection: In Matthew's Gospel the religious leaders are shown in a very poor light, and Jesus is often shown confronting them very strongly. In today's reading the concern of the Pharisees was that Jesus and his disciples failed to abide by a tradition that they held dear. Jesus' response may sound harsh, but he was offended by traditions of ritual purity that were valued over justice, mercy and

compassion, and he pulled no punches in saying so. The example he used to prove his point was particularly shocking. Religious people were using their religion to excuse their failure to care for their own family - in direct contradiction to God's commands. But Jesus knew he wasn't the first to confront these tendencies in people. He quoted Isaiah who noted how easy it is for us to fall into outward observance of religious rituals with no true commitment to God's ways or God's values.

You don't have to look far to see this same tendency at work in our world today. From politicians who use religious language and the pretense of religious observance to win votes and support, to preachers who use religious manipulation to profit themselves, the abuse of religion is still widespread. But, this lack of integrity only highlights the need for people who will live differently, who will even break with tradition if it means being more effective at showing compassion and justice to others.

What traditions might you need to break to follow Jesus' way today?

Practice for Today: Jesus was not "anti-tradition". He was simply against the use of tradition for selfish or unjust ends. His focus was not on ritual purity, but on compassion, mercy and justice. This is why we need to practice prayer with discernment and wholeheartedness. When we pray not as a tradition, but as an exercise in mercy and justice, we are always drawn to live with greater compassion. Today pray from your heart, especially for those who are oppressed by human traditions of any kind.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May your grace and mercy liberate your people from bondage to unjust traditions, O God.

Thursday 09 November 2017

Reading: Psalm 70

Reflection: As we turn our thoughts toward Sunday, we shift from the challenge to live with integrity to the call to live with hope and expectation of God's presence and action in our lives. Sunday's parable of the well-prepared bridesmaids who brought sufficient oil to last through the long wait for the bridegroom illustrates this principle. But, today the Psalmist shows the power of living with hope in the midst of tragedy and trauma.

We may not know what the specifics of the writer's situation were, but the words of the Psalm make it clear that he was experiencing some persecution by others. For whatever reason, there were enemies who sought to destroy and humiliate this Psalmist, and who thought they had him trapped. But, the Psalmist had a hidden hope. He knew that those who seek after God and live according to God's way of salvation always have a source of strength and liberation that can sustain them through the worst of times. While our quest to live with integrity may bring us into conflict with those who prefer expediency and deception, we have hope that living by God's truth will ultimately bring us life and joy. So, even when we feel poor and needy, we can continue to trust in God's ways, and wait for God's salvation to come. And even in the midst of our suffering, we can know the gladness of God's presence and the satisfaction of knowing we have remained true to our convictions.

Where is your commitment to integrity being challenged today? How can you draw on your hope in God to sustain you?

Practice for Today: There is a reason that the Bible calls us to praise God in all situations. It is because our praises remind us of God's presence and salvation and nurture our hope in God. So, as we turn our focus on God in praise, so our commitment to God's ways is strengthened and sustained. Today allow your praises to sustain you, no matter what you may be facing.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for in you I find hope and salvation in every situation.

Friday 10 November 2017

Reading: Amos 3:1-12

Reflection: As we begin to reflect on Sunday's theme of hope, the readings for the next two days may seem a little strange. Both today's prophecy from Amos and tomorrow's reading speak of chaos, disaster and great suffering - events which usually cause despair. But, if we cannot hope in the midst of the worst of times, our hope is not really hope at all.

When we read passages like these it is important to keep a key truth in mind. The Bible contains an unfolding revelation of God, and so some of the ideas about God that are revealed in the Old Testament

do not align with the view of God that Jesus revealed. One example is verse 6 where God says, "Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has planned it?" This sounds like God plans disaster to punish people for their sins, but we know in Christ that this is not the case. Rather God stands with us in suffering, whatever the cause, and seeks to bring healing and restoration. What used to be seen as punishment is probably better thought of as consequence.

The point of Amos' prophecy is to confront the people of God with their wickedness and to warn them of the destructive consequences that will result. The picture of violent judgement on the dishonesty and injustice of God's people is dramatic and disturbing, but the key to Amos' words is in verse 7. God does nothing without revealing God's purposes to God's prophets. This means that God always warns, always offers an alternative path, and always calls us to God's life-giving way. If we ignore God's warning, we must face the consequences, but no matter what may come, we can find hope in the knowledge that God continues to call us to the way of grace, compassion, justice, life and restoration.

Where is God calling you to deeper life today?

Practice for Today: When things are going well, it is easy to live on autopilot, going through the motions of faith, with no real thought for what we do or why. But, when life gets difficult, we inevitably begin to ask why, and we begin trying to understand what is happening. While this reflectiveness should always characterise our lives, it is helpful in tough times to nurture the discipline of listening. As we listen for God's wisdom, we often hear the call to life even in the midst of our pain. Make time to listen for the Spirit's whisper today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In good times and bad, O God, I listen for the voice of your Spirit.

Saturday 11 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 24:1-14

Reflection: Both Jesus, and the Gospel writers who recorded his words, use some techniques in their teaching that may be unfamiliar to us. For example, many interpreters take Jesus' words in today's reading as case of end time prophecy. But, the events Jesus prophesied - the destruction of the Temple, for example - happened

shortly after his lifetime in the war with Rome of 66 - 70 AD. Part of what makes it difficult to interpret Jesus' words here is that he shifts his language in verse 4, and starts using the prophetic language of apocalypse. The word apocalypse simply refers to making things known. So, Jesus embraces the apocalyptic language of the Old Testament prophets in order to reveal some important truths which are designed to give us hope, not lead us to despair.

The key to understanding apocalyptic language is to understand that it uses the language of earthly catastrophe to describe the battle between cosmic forces of good and evil. But, the battle that is described is really waged in our hearts and minds, which is why the passage challenges us to be careful about how we respond to the turmoil. If we remember that God's Reign is at work, and that evil has already been defeated by Christ through the cross, then we can stay faithful and hopeful no matter what we may face. And, through our faithfulness, God's Good News is proclaimed to the world. This is why it is so tragic when followers of Jesus succumb to pessimism and negativity. When we allow these negative responses to prevail, the Good News of God's Reign gets lost. But, when we remain hopeful even in the midst of corruption, injustice and conflict, we declare in our lives that evil does not have the last word.

How can your life proclaim hope in God's Reign today?

Practice for Today: When we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by negativity and despair, we fall into the habits of complaining, criticising, and cynicism. But, when we nurture our hope, we learn to give thanks for the goodness we enjoy even in the midst of pain. Thanksgiving does not just remind us of God's presence and activity, and it does not just express hope. Thanksgiving strengthens and expands our hope. Practice thanksgiving as a hope-strengthening discipline today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I give thanks to you, O God, because even in the darkest times, I have hope in your Reign.

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