

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
19 - 25 November 2017

Thought for the Week:

What we hope for and desire has the power to motivate us to profound and transforming action. In fact, if we want to know what our real motivations are, we need only look at what we actually do. It is our actions, not our words or even our dreams, that reveal the truest hopes and desires of our hearts. And, if we claim to hope for something, but do nothing to move toward it, we are only deceiving ourselves and our so-called hopes are really just a fantasy.

Nowhere is this more true than when it comes to the Reign of God. Through last week we explored the hope we have in the coming of God's Reign, and the power of that hope to sustain and strengthen us through the best and worst of times. But, if that hope is real, it must be seen in how we live. If we really believe in God's Reign me, that must filter through every thought, attitude, word, action and interaction.

This week we meditate on how our hope in God's Reign translates into hopeful, transforming action.

Sunday 19 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection: We cannot read the parables in Matthew 25 without remembering Jesus' urgent call to be ready for the coming of God's Reign in Matthew 24. When we also remember that chapter and verse numbers were not part of the original manuscript, but were added much later, we can see that the writer placed all of these stories together to make a point. They are all intended to tell us something about the ever-coming Reign of God and our need to be ready to participate in its coming. Also, when we read about a master going on a trip and leaving servants with a job to do, we must take note that there is a similar story just a few verses before this in 24:44-51. So, now that we have a sense of the context, we can turn to the old familiar parable of the talents.

The gifts that are given to the three servants represent the resources they have to contribute to the master's influence and wealth. Two servants, who clearly have a good relationship with the master, use their abilities and so, when the master returns, they are ready to show how they have participated in the master's work. The third, who is afraid of the master and views him as harsh, buries what he has been given. And so when the master returns he has contributed nothing to the master's work. As a result he is judged harshly (as are the others who fail to be ready in the other parables). The point here is not just about whether we use the resources we have been given or not. *It's about what we use them for.*

All of these stories are about the unexpected coming of God's Reign, and our capacity to participate in what God is doing whether we see God's presence or not. If we use our talents well, but only for our own benefit, we have failed to be ready and to participate in the coming of God's Reign. But, if we use our talents for the sake of God's Reign – for the blessing and upliftment of others – we have shown ourselves to be part of God's mission.

How can you use your resources of time, talents and treasures for the sake of God's Reign today?

Practice for Today: One of the simplest ways to participate in the work of God's Reign is to become well-practiced in the discipline of giving. Whether it's our time, friendship, expertise, compassion, material resources, or solidarity, we all have something to contribute that can bless and uplift those around us. Today, find every opportunity to participate in God's mission through the act of giving.

Breath-Prayer for Today: What you have given me, O God, I use as my contribution to your mission.

Monday 20 November 2017

Reading: Zechariah 1:7-17

Reflection: Zechariah's ministry was to the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem after decades in Babylon. The initial joy of these people had turned to despair when they had discovered the devastation of their city and the destruction of their Temple. Zechariah brought a grand message of hope to encourage and motivate them to do the work of rebuilding. In today's reading we

encountered one of Zechariah's mysterious visions. It begins with the amazing report from the riders who have patrolled the earth that the world is at peace. This in itself, would have been an incredible message of hope to a people who had endured hundreds of years of conflict. But, then an angel intercedes with God on behalf of God's people, asking God to forgive them and show them mercy. In response God offers a promise of joy, restoration, and prosperity. The guarantee that the Temple would be rebuilt was an affirmation that God's presence and love would be experienced again.

Zechariah's prophecies of hope must have made a huge difference to the people. As they looked at the destruction of their old homes, they must have been tempted to despair, and they needed a vision of what their life could become if they stayed motivated. Zechariah was not the only prophet whose words gave the people a vision of a restored city and a new, glorious Temple – Haggai was another – and these messages that nurtured the longing in the people's hearts for a life of peace and rest must have gone a long way to sustain their hope and keep them working to rebuild their lives.

How can you be a messenger of hope like this to those who need to be encouraged in your world today?

Practice for Today: Messages of hope are not hard to speak. They do not need to be unrealistic or escapist to have power. We simply need to help those around us to see what is possible if we keep hope alive. But, whether in word or action, it is an act of love to nurture hope in another's heart. Today, use every opportunity to encourage and build hope in those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Because I believe in your Reign, O God, I seek to nurture hope in those around me.

Tuesday 21 November 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-16

Reflection: Paul's first letter to the embattled Thessalonian church is filled with hope. It is probably the first of Paul's letters to be written, making it the oldest book in the New Testament. In the midst of persecution and the competing value systems in the ancient world, the apostle encouraged the believers to live differently from those around them. And the difference to which he called them was

rooted in their hope in Christ. Today's section describes the kind of life that should be seen in hopeful followers of Jesus.

The apostle begins with calling the community to respect their leaders, probably because leadership in the face of persecution and struggle is never easy. But, then he moves on to call all the people to be at peace with one another, to support and encourage those who are weak in some way, to be patient with one another, and to do good. Their lives are to be marked by joy, prayerfulness and thanksgiving. These characteristics are all manifestations of our hope in God's purposes, in one another and the community which we share, and even in ourselves as God's children empowered by God's Spirit. And it is ordinary lives lived in these simple, hopeful ways, that make the world a more hopeful place.

How can you express your hope in simple practical ways today?

Practice for Today: Almost all of the characteristics Paul mentions as manifestations of hope are expressions of kindness toward one another. When we live in hope, we are able to be more patient and supportive toward one another, and we are able to treat each other as God's beloved. Today, let your hope be seen in acts of kindness toward those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: My hope in your purposes and presence, O God, leads me to believe that acts of kindness make a difference.

Wednesday 22 November 2017

Reading: Psalm 9:1-14

Reflection: The last few verses of today's reading indicate that the writer was experiencing some kind of persecution from other people. His cry for God to save him is rooted in his hope in God's saving power. He begins with a memory of God's marvellous works, including a time in which he experienced God's rescue. But, he goes on to place his hope in an even more stable and eternal place. It is because God reigns, God is the ultimate judge, and God provides refuge for the oppressed that the writer can find security by placing his hope in God. And this hope is expressed in praise.

When life gets hard, that's when our capacity for hope is tested the most. While we may need time to grieve and express our fear and

pain, when our hope is strong, we always manage to find reasons to give thanks and praise. When our hope is strong we are able to endure the tough times as we work toward a better future. And we are able to avoid the cynicism and bitterness that robs us of our humanity. This is why, along with faith and love, hope is considered one of the big three characteristics of the Christ-following life.

How can you strengthen your hope in Jesus today?

Practice for Today: In verse 11 the Psalmist speaks of telling the world about God's deeds. This is because, when our own stories are not enough to sustain our hope, the stories of others can give us the inspiration we need. That's why the stories of the Bible can be so encouraging. As we see how others sustained their hope in God, our capacity for hope is strengthened. Today allow your reading of the Bible to make your hope stronger and more resilient.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I read the stories of faithful people of the past, O God, so my own hope in you grows stronger.

Thursday 23 November 2017

Reading: Revelation 14:1-11

Reflection: This Sunday is the last of this Church Year. The following week we begin Advent, the start of the new year in the Church Calendar. As we close out the year, we are pointed once again to the reason for our hope: Christ reigns over the cosmos. In a world in which we are tempted to believe that God's Reign is weaker than the power of evil, it is good to remember that Christ is King, and that he reigns in a very different way from human monarchs.

With this in mind, today we read a vision from the Revelation in which the final triumph of Christ's Reign is described. Once again we must remember that this is metaphorical, apocalyptic literature that is not intended to be taken literally, but symbolically. The essence of this vision is the final defeat of evil's power and the manifestation of God's justice in the world. Jesus, the Lamb, stands on God's mountain with 144,000 redeemed ones. This number represents God's perfect community, made up of people from across the globe who have embraced God's ways. They alone can sing God's song of love and justice for they have given their lives to live it out. But, Babylon, which represents all that opposes God's

ways, has fallen, facing the consequence of the evil it has wrought. When we remember that the Revelation was written to struggling, persecuted churches, we can imagine how inspiring and encouraging this vision must have been, and how their hope in Christ's Reign must have sustained them.

Where, in your life, do you see a vision of Christ's reign at work?

Practice for Today: The Bible constantly depicts those who have been touched by God's Reign as responding in praise and celebration, even in very difficult circumstances. When our hearts have been captured by a vision of God's love and justice, we cannot help but rejoice in the new world that is inexorably coming into being around us. Today, allow your praises to remind you of the Reign of Christ and to inspire your hope in the love and justice it brings.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, Jesus, for you reign over the cosmos with love and justice.

Friday 24 November 2017

Reading: 1 Chronicles 17:1-15

Reflection: There is a wonderful play on words in today's reading. King David, whose character mixed incredible faith and nobility with moments of great weakness, narcissism and violence, had come to the decision that he should build a house for God. While there may well have been noble motives behind this, it also represented a kind of domestication of God. It revealed a small vision of God, and a sense in David that he could somehow offer God something that God needed and couldn't get without him. But, God gave the prophet Nathan a vision that turned this whole idea upside down. David was not to build a house for God. Rather God would build a house for David (house here means a dynasty - this is where the word play comes in). It would be David's son who would build God's house and this son would have an everlasting throne. While this was taken to mean Solomon, who did build a glorious Temple for God, the prophecy actually points forward to the Messiah, who would establish God's Reign on the earth and rule over it forever. As believers in Jesus we see the fulfilment of this prophecy in the Christ.

The challenge of this passage, though, is for us to consider how we

might be tempted, like David, to domesticate God. Whenever we think we can do something for God which should impress God, or twist God's arm to give us something or do something for us, we have fallen into a dangerously small view of God. David had to have his view of God exploded to realise that God didn't need a house. God's Reign was bigger than anything David could imagine. In the same way, we need to remember that God is far bigger and far more mysterious than we can ever imagine. Whenever we deal with God, however good or noble our motives may be, we always have to hold in mind the truth that our tiny minds are hopelessly inadequate to grasp the infinite, eternal, glorious Mystery of God and God's Reign. And, if this doesn't lead us into praise, gratitude and humility, we haven't really encountered God's greatness yet.

Where are you tempted to domesticate God today? How can you be open to encounter God's greatness and mystery a little more?

Practice for Today: When we spend all our time in worship making noise, or speaking our own words, it is hard to encounter God's greatness and mystery. Even our most expansive words cannot begin to express the glory of God. This is why we need moments of silence and stillness. We need to make time to allow God to overwhelm us with God's greatness and infiniteness. Today make some time for silence and stillness and ask God to overwhelm you with Mystery, awe and wonder.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I am still, O God, that I may know that you are God.

Saturday 25 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 12:46-50

Reflection: It is so easy to speak words that honour Jesus as God's just and righteous king. But, whether we truly live with Christ as our king is revealed by our actions. The amazing thing, though, is that when we live in obedience to the Reign of God, Jesus treats us not as subjects, but as siblings. But, if we are to be the family of God, we need to bear the family resemblance. We need to learn to follow the way of Jesus not because we are commanded to do so, but because our love for God drives us to do what pleases God. Like parents who long to teach their children the most fulfilling and

satisfying way to live, God seeks to lead us into abundant life. And like children who long to make their parents proud, we should find ourselves striving to do the things that Jesus has shown to be God's desire. This is how the best families work.

It must have been rather shocking for the followers of Jesus to see him ignore his family and then include those who were not blood relatives as part of his family. Family commitments in Jesus' society were sacrosanct. Every person carried great responsibility to their family, and to shirk these obligations was frowned upon very strongly. But, Jesus wanted to show his followers that the Reign of God carries obligations that go beyond the ties of blood relations. The will of God - which we have seen is to love God and others with all we have and are - must lead us to include all others in our family, because everyone is welcome in God's family. We are called to erase the lines between those whom we love and those whom we don't, and allow our love to be shamelessly indiscriminate. And, paradoxically, when we learn to love like this, we end up loving those closest to us even better.

How can you "do the will of the Father" by loving as Jesus did?

Practice for Today: Jesus makes it clear again and again that our family resemblance as children of God must be visible in our lives through the way we live. This means that we are to treat others as Christ has treated us - as beloved children of God. When we make a point to welcome others in Christ's name, and to accept them as sisters and brothers in Christ, we show that we really are part of God's family, and we draw others into the love. Today, be as welcoming of others as you would want them to be of you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have welcomed me into your family, O God, so I show that I am your child by welcoming others.

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