

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

26 November – 02 December 2017

Thought for the Week:

Today is the last Sunday of this Church year. The Sunday before Advent is always known as the celebration of Christ the King or the Reign of Christ. It's fitting to end the journey of the year by remembering that God's Reign is among us and is eternal. It is encouraging to keep in mind that the Christ who brings God's Reign into being, is the one who came as servant of all and who established God's Reign among us by giving his life to destroy the power of evil and death.

As we end the journey of this year, though, we also prepare ourselves to begin the journey again, which means that in the back of our minds is the truth that this King whom we celebrate is the one who entered our human world and experiences as a new-born baby, and lived a life of humble service and sacrifice. This reminds us that the Reign of Christ is not exercised through force of arms or political manipulation, but through compassion, love and justice.

This week we remember the upside-down Reign of Christ and we commit again to living by its values and priorities.

Reign of Christ Sunday 26 November 2017

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Reflection: When we read the parable of the sheep and the goats it is easy to get caught up in the drama of the great throne, with reward for the sheep and judgement for the goats. But, before we consider these details, it is important to note the central message of the parable: '...when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!' (CEB). Every person we encounter, no matter who they are or what they've done, is a beloved child of God made in the image of God. And how we treat them is how we treat Jesus! There is no difference in Jesus' mind between loving God and loving others. There is no difference between living as citizens of the Reign of Christ and serving the

most vulnerable and the most rejected. What a miracle that God would identify so closely with us, and what a challenge to put our faith and love into action!

Jesus is speaking in parable, and using the mysterious apocalyptic language of the prophets. When he speaks of dividing the nations and sending the goats into eternal punishment, he is not speaking literally. He is showing how hellish the lives of those who refuse to care for others are, and how blessed the lives of those who live in love are. As Catherine of Sienna said, "...all the way to heaven is heaven." And the opposite is also true - all the way to hell is hell.

Who needs you to see Christ in them today? How can you serve Christ by acting in love toward them?

Practice for Today: In the parable of the sheep and goats, all the things Jesus points out that the sheep have done and the goats have not are very practical actions - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners. Following Jesus is not about being "super-spiritual". It is about making a habit of these simple, practical expressions of love. Today, feed, cloth or visit someone who needs to be loved, and look for the Christ in them.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I serve those around me, Jesus, so I am serving and loving you.

Monday 27 November 2017

Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Reflection: The writer of the second letter to Timothy offers us a concise and inspiring vision of the Reign of Christ. He begins, as Christian faith always does, with the truth of the resurrection. Christ Reigns because death and evil were not able to overcome his life and goodness. Then, after describing some of the suffering he endured for preaching the message of Jesus' life, the writer goes on to proclaim the impact of Christ's Reign on the lives of believers. If we are willing to give our lives for the sake of God's Reign we are raised to a new quality and experience of life. If we are willing to endure the hardship of living the Jesus way, we will participate in God's Reign. This does not mean that we will lord it over other people, but that we will reflect God's Reign the way Jesus did - which was through a life of humility, service, self-giving and love.

Then there is this seemingly contradictory statement - if we deny him, he will deny us, but even if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful. The emphasis here is on Jesus' faithfulness, because he cannot deny who he is. So, no matter what we do, Jesus remains faithful to us - committed to loving and saving us. However, when we deny Christ, we place ourselves outside of God's Reign because we stop living by the values and priorities of God's Reign. We don't stop being God's beloved, but we do stop experiencing the benefits of being God's beloved - much like the prodigal son. But, as soon as we align ourselves again with God's ways, we once again experience the fullness of God's love and life. This is the gracious power of the Reign of Christ in our lives.

How can you die and live, suffer and reign with Christ today?

Practice for Today: Living and dying, reigning and suffering with Jesus are all about following the ways of Jesus in our own lives. When we build our lives around the priorities and values of God's Reign, we experience our lives as immersed in God's presence and love. But, to do this we need a model to follow, which is why the Bible is so helpful. In its pages we see how Jesus, and those who followed him the past, lived, and we can apply those lessons to our own lives. Today allow your reading of the Bible to lead you deeper into the life of Christ.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I follow your ways, Jesus, so I go deeper into God's life and love.

Tuesday 28 November 2017

Reading: Revelation 19:1-9

Reflection: Chapter 18 of Revelation describes the fall of Babylon, the city that represents all that opposes the values and priorities of God's Reign. Now in today's reading, we see a vision of celebration in heaven for the final triumph of God's Reign on the earth. The writer describes the thunderous praises of God's people, and the words of their songs which describe God's Reign as true and just. God's people also rejoice because, with Babylon destroyed, the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb. Throughout the New Testament God's Reign is described as a wedding feast, and God's people are described as a bride, with Jesus as the bridegroom. In

today's reading, this same metaphor is used to give us a powerful, symbolic vision of the final union of God with God's people, and the final manifestation of God's love and justice in the world.

Human empires always use images of power - military might and weaponry, wealth and ostentation - to depict their influence and generate awe and fear. But, God's Reign uses the image of a wedding feast - an image of love, creativity, and unity. God's Reign does not generate fear and awe through images of dominance, but through images of intimacy. This alone should tell us that God's Reign is very different from any human power structure, and that the kind of fear we feel for God is not terror, but reverence and wonder.

Where do you see evidence of this Reign of God emerging in your world? How can you celebrate it today?

Practice for Today: In a book that is reputed to be filled with judgement, Revelation includes an amazing amount of praise. This is because the writer knew that praise focuses our gaze on God and opens our hearts to recognise the signs of God's Reign within and among us. Today, allow your praises to keep your gaze on God and to open your heart to the signs of God's Reign in your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your Reign that is bringing love and justice into my world.

Wednesday 29 November 2017

Reading: John 5:19-40

Reflection: There are a number of ideas in today's reading, and all of them can easily be misunderstood. When we come to passages like this one we must always be careful not to read our own ideas or expectations into the words. Often familiar words have very unfamiliar meanings when we encounter them in Scripture. In this section of John's Gospel Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders who had started harassing him for healing someone on the Sabbath. So, Jesus' words must be understood in terms of the way the Pharisees would have understood them.

The essence of Jesus' message is that he and the Father are one in purpose and nature, and that Jesus' message is the way to eternal life. This means that Jesus has the authority to judge and to give life

to those who believe in him. The phrase “eternal life” can also be translated as “the life of that age”. It refers to life in the age when God’s Reign has been established on the earth. So, when Jesus speaks of giving life to believers, he means that those who receive his message and live it out are already experiencing the life of God’s Reign here and now. And when he speaks about judging people, he is speaking about his capacity to rightly discern who is living in alignment with God’s Reign and who isn’t. But, through it all the simple challenge is this: it is not religious tradition, or even the Scriptures that bring us this new kind of life. It is union with Jesus alone - with his values, priorities and Spirit. This is what it means for Jesus to be king in our lives.

How are you acknowledging Jesus as king and receiving Jesus’ life?

Practice for Today: The experience of Jesus’ life here and now is not just about doing certain things, or accepting certain ideas, values, or priorities. It’s about uniting our entire lives with Jesus. This means that Jesus’ presence and life must flow through everything. And for this to happen, we need constantly to invite the Spirit of Christ to fill us and empower us. Today, invoke the Spirit’s presence and power in everything you do.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Spirit of Christ, and let my life be lived in your presence and power.

Thursday 30 November 2017

Reading: Zechariah 13:1-9

Reflection: Today’s reading comes from the final oracle of Zechariah. In this prophecy the phrase “on that day” is repeated many times. It is a reference to a time when Israel will be restored as a nation in peace and justice, and God will be established as king over the entire earth. Today’s reading begins with a vision of a fountain that will cleanse God’s people from all impurity, idolatry, and false prophecy. It is shocking to think of parents killing their children for prophesying falsely, but the prophet uses this metaphor to show how strong the commitment of the people to God’s ways will become – not as a literal call to execute false prophets.

Then, the passage goes on to speak of how the purification of God’s people will happen. The first part of this section offers a vision of

God’s shepherd who will be struck down, causing the sheep to scatter. In the New Testament this is taken to refer to Jesus’ death. But, through the trial and suffering, God’s people are to be strengthened and refined, and their relationship with God is to be deepened. Many followers of Jesus can testify to the truth of this vision. When we suffer, recognising that Christ suffers with us, we often find a deeper communion with God, and we become much more Christlike, compassionate, gracious, and resilient. When we speak about living under the Reign of Christ, we’re not talking about a life free of struggle. Rather, we’re talking about a life of perseverance through suffering, based on our faith in Jesus, and our hope of the future when his Reign overcomes evil and death.

How can you endure whatever trials you’re facing with Christlike faith, hope and love today?

Practice for Today: When we go through difficult times, it’s important to remember that God does not desire or create these times of pain. But, in God’s grace, God is able to use our suffering to strengthen us and lead us closer to becoming our best selves. But, this means that we need to be open to seeing and experiencing God’s work in our dark times. This calls for mindfulness and openness, which the practice of meditation teaches us. Today, as you contemplate the difficulties in your life make time to meditate on God’s presence and grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I meditate on your Reign, O God, so I am sustained and refined through my darkest times.

Friday 01 December 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

Reflection: Today’s reading from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians presents some challenging ideas that can easily be misunderstood. The first part is fairly familiar. It contains a call to live in a way that pleases God, as the apostles have taught. Then there follows a description of what a God-pleasing life looks like. It is a life of holiness and honour in which we are not controlled by our passions, but love one another. It is significant that the apostle relates this to living a quiet life which speaks gently to those around us. To follow Christ we don’t have to be remarkable or highly visible

like celebrities. We don't have to do "great things". We simply have to do our ordinary things with great love, as Mother Teresa said.

Then the apostle turns to our future hope, and how this impacts our grief over loved ones who have died. Here is where misunderstandings creep in. The apostle is not giving a blue print of future events, and he is not teaching that there will one day be a rapture that removes believers from the earth. Rather, since the New Testament teaches resurrection of all people and of the earth, the apostle simply seeks to reassure us that in Christ our life endures beyond death. Our hope is that ultimately all of God's children, living and dead, will be united in God's Reign of love and justice. This hope also flows through the whole Advent season.

How does the hope of God's life and love empower you to live a quiet life of love for those around you?

Practice for Today: If we are to live lives of quiet love for those around us, we need a source of hope and strength to sustain us. This source of hope is God's mission of love and justice. As we practice the discipline of thanksgiving for God's Reign, so our hope is nurtured and expanded. Today allow your thanksgiving to fill you with hope and lead you to love.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, for your Reign of justice and love, and for how it leads me to live in love.

Saturday 02 December 2017

Reading: Micah 2:1-13

Reflection: The prophet Micah (who was a contemporary of Isaiah) was deeply disturbed by the abuse of power and the injustice of the leaders of the nation of Judah. He saw that this corruption and evil would bring about disaster for his people, and he boldly spoke out in God's name. Some of his prophecies, like the one we read today, were extremely harsh. This is probably because, like many other prophets, Micah used extreme language to try and get the people's attention and bring them to repentance. Once again it is important to remember that what the prophet refers to as God's judgement is really what we would understand as consequence. The disaster which Micah foresaw was the logical result of the way the people were living. Those who live by injustice inevitably face disastrous

consequences when the fruit of their self-centredness returns to them. But, notice how the people reacted to Micah's words. They didn't want to hear what he had to say, and they tried to silence him. But, Micah refused to be silenced, and he pointed out that the only reason his words were offensive was because of the people's evil ways.

Yet, in spite of all this, Micah's message included a promise of restoration. There was always a thread of hope running through the words of judgement. Even though the people would have to face the consequences of their actions, God would not abandon them, and would heal them, restore them, and bring them back to a home of justice in God's love and presence. As we begin the Advent season, this message resonates with the journey we start tomorrow. Even as we see evil at work around us, we know that ultimately God will bring justice and God's world will be healed and restored. This is our hope, and it is why we follow Jesus - to participate in God's mission to save the world.

How can your hope in God's Reign of justice and love lead you to work in some small way to participate in God's mission today?

Practice for Today: Our lives speak, whether we know it or not. Some lives speak of injustice and abuse of power. And some lives challenge injustice and proclaim a new world of love and justice. When we prioritise love, and seek to be just in all our dealings with others, we participate in proclaiming God's mission to the world. Today, let your life speak of God's Reign.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May my life proclaim your Reign of love and justice, O God, through the way I act and treat others.

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