

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

03 – 09 December 2017

Thought for the Week:

And so the cycle of the year begins again, but with a different perspective. This year the Gospel of Mark (with some input, as usual, from John) gives us the frame through which to view the story of Jesus and its implications for our lives. Advent Sunday always draws our attention to the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus, and the vision he gives of God's presence breaking into the world of human affairs. As we begin the journey through the life of Jesus, which will fill our worship for the next half a year, we start with God's hope-filled end in mind. We are reminded that our world is not random, and that the cosmos is moving toward a future of restoration, wholeness and unity in Christ. We are reminded that even in the midst of the world's turmoil God is at work, and God's glorious presence is always breaking into our lives.

But, the purpose of the Bible's prophetic writing is not so much to focus our energy on a future life of bliss and glory. It is to allow our future hope to change how we live and work in our world today. When we realise that God's dream of wholeness and unity for the cosmos is being worked out in our own time, and in our own lives, it changes how we think, how we interact with others, and how we live. It gives our lives meaning, because we recognise that we are participants in God's mission. Like those who came before us, and those who come after us, we just have to watch for God's presence and follow God's directions, and we will add our small contribution to the great movement of God's Reign in the world.

This week we reflect on the meaning of Advent, and how we can be more alert to the signs of God's presence and mission among us.

Sunday 03 December 2017

Reading: Mark 13:24-37

Reflection: Like all apocalyptic prophecy, Jesus' words were spoken into his own time, but they apply just as well to our time,

while also having relevance for the future time when God brings all things to wholeness. However, they were never meant to be a blueprint for the end of time. This is clear from Jesus' statement that no one - including himself - except the Father knew when "these things" would happen. But, it is also clear from the fact that Jesus drew on the imagery of the Old Testament prophets - especially Daniel - to make his point. Verse 26, about Jesus "coming on the clouds," is a reference to Daniel 7:13 which refers to "one like a Son of Man" entering God's presence and receiving authority, glory and an eternal kingdom. So, it is not meant to be a literal description of Jesus' return to earth.

The point of Jesus' words - and of the role of this passage in Advent - is found in the parable of the man who goes away, leaving his servants with instructions about what they were to do, and how they were to keep watch for his return. Jesus has given us the message of God's Reign, and he has told us what to do. He has also called us constantly to keep watch for God's presence and activity in our world. The vision of our future hope, then, is meant to empower us to do this work, and stay alert for God's presence, so that we can cooperate with God's mission, and make God's Reign visible.

How are you watching for God's presence in your life? And, how can you participate in God's mission today?

Practice for Today: An awareness of God's presence and activity in our world requires us to be mindful as we go through our days. The practice of praise, which turns our attention on God and God's Reign, is one practice that makes us more mindful and open to the move of God's Spirit. Today, allow your praises to open your eyes to God's work in your life and community.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for you are always coming into my world with grace, love and justice.

Monday 04 December 2017

Reading: Micah 4:1-5

Reflection: While the prophet Isaiah is known for his glorious visions of a restored earth under the Reign of God, his contemporary, Micah, also proclaimed the hope of healing and justice for the world. Today's reading speaks of the mountain of

God's Temple as the highest of all the world's mountains, and a place to which all the nations will come to receive God's instruction and guidance. This vision is a reminder that true justice for the world cannot be found in war or the dominance of one nation over another, but only through the equality, justice and mutual respect that comes through the values and priorities of God's Reign. It is only when we allow God's wisdom to mediate our conflicts, and when we take the risk of beating our swords and spears into instruments of peace that we will know the kind of justice and security that we all long for.

While this vision is grand and global, the principles it offers apply equally to our personal lives and relationships. This is the challenge of the Advent season - to recognise how God's appearance in our world changes things on a global scale, but also on a personal one. So, wherever we may be tempted to take up swords against one another in our families or communities - through acts of rejection, judgement, disrespect or aggression - we are challenged to turn to peace instead. Rather than seek to harm those who hurt or oppose us, we are called to encourage and nurture them in order to find peace together. And, when all the individuals in our world begin to do this, global peace becomes inevitable.

What swords and spears do you need to beat into instrument of peace today?

Practice for Today: There can be no peace without forgiveness. As long as we insist on holding on to our offence at one another, we will continue to create conflict. But, when we learn to release our indignation and embrace an attitude of forgiveness and acceptance toward one another, we can find healing and reconciliation. Today, make a special effort to give and receive forgiveness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I dream of a world of peace, O God, and I practice forgiveness as my contribution to it.

Tuesday 05 December 2017

Reading: Psalm 79

Reflection: The Advent season is about more than just preparation for Christmas. It is a time when we connect with the deep longings of our hearts for God's presence and salvation to be visible in our

world. This means that it is a season of hope in God's accessibility and love. But it is also a season in which we are challenged to recognise that we don't always experience God's presence as we would like. Our world is a challenging place, and the pain of this can be overwhelming. When we see violence, corruption, poverty and disease ravaging our world, it is natural for us to grieve and to long for a better world. This is why the lament prayers of the Bible are so comforting. They show us that the Bible does not ignore our suffering, that God feels our pain, and that it is right and good for us to cry out for God's intervention.

Today's prayer from Psalm 79 is a good example of biblical lament. As the writer observed the destruction of his homeland, and the violence done to his people, he cried out in grief and longing to God. This prayer contains all kinds of emotions that we may feel are inappropriate. There is grief and offence at what Israel's enemies have done. There is anger, both at the invaders and at God for allowing this disaster to happen. There is even a request for God to enact vengeance on the enemies of God's people. This vulnerable honesty gives this prayer its power, and reveals the writer's deep faith in God's love. He knew that even his "unacceptable" emotions were not a problem. In the end, he finally declares thanksgiving and praise, which reveals his underlying faith in God's grace.

Where in your life do you need to get honest with God like this?

Practice for Today: Sometimes we try so hard to be good, that we bury our negative emotions deep within us. But, our negative feelings always come out - and if we don't work with them consciously, they come out in destructive ways. This is why lament is such a healing practice - it helps us express our negative feelings in a positive way. Today, express any feelings of grief, anger, fear, and despair through a prayer of lament to God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Hear my grief, God. I pour it out to you.

Wednesday 06 December 2017

Reading: Luke 21:34-38

Reflection: The biblical writers often speak of "that day" or the "Day of the Lord", and Jesus adopted that phrase in his own preaching.

“That day” is the time when God’s Messiah would come and establish God’s Reign in fullness on the earth. It was to be a day when human injustice would be ended, and equality, peace, and justice would come. In one sense “that day” came when Jesus began his ministry, but in another sense God’s Reign is still to be established on the earth. And, in yet a third sense, “that day” comes whenever we experience God’s presence and see justice, peace, and love prevail among us. So, while Jesus’ words in today’s reading have meaning for some future time for which we rightly hope and long, our faith is not only about this future hope. We must also be ready for God’s presence to be revealed among us at any time.

Jesus’ warning in today’s reading was probably spoken to call the people away from violent revolution against Rome, and to warn them of what would happen if they rejected God’s way of justice and peace. He spoke of the destruction of the Temple, and of the suffering and death that would come, and these events happened just a few decades later. But, he also knew that God was always seeking to appear in people’s lives to transform them into people of grace, justice, reconciliation, and love. So, he urged his hearers not to allow any temporary pleasure to dull their awareness of God’s presence. The same applies to us – if we are to experience God’s transforming power in our lives and our world, we need to stay alert to see the signs when God’s Reign breaks in.

How can you stay alert today?

Practice for Today: Mindfulness of God’s presence and work is a skill that is learned through daily practice. Making time each day for prayer and Scripture reading is one way to nurture this capacity. But, the discipline of listening is another way. When we make time to still our own voices and listen to the world, to those around us and to the whisper of God’s Spirit, we become more aware of the move of God in our world. Today make time for active listening.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I listen for your voice, O God, so I become more alert to the signs of your coming.

Thursday 07 December 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Reflection: After hearing the message of the apostles, and seeing

its power in the way the apostles lived and touched the lives of people, the Thessalonians came to faith. But, for them it didn’t stop with a decision. Their faith led them to live in such a way that other believers around the world looked to them as an example. This is simply because they turned away from anything that competed with God in their hearts, and they lived faithfully in service of God and others. But, their lives were so attractive that other people kept talking about them and the word spread. This is the best form of evangelism – not pushing a message on people that we think they need to hear, but simply living so they long to find what we have.

Notice, though, that underneath this beautiful life of the Thessalonian Christians was a firm hope in God’s Reign. When we remember that these believers were severely persecuted for their faith, their beautiful lives are even more remarkable. Yet, they knew that their suffering was temporary, and that God was at work within them and in their world to bring about justice, peace and love. They knew that the life they had found in Jesus was worth suffering for because it brought fullness and joy not just to them but to everyone they encountered. And they knew that they were participating in God’s mission to restore and unite the entire universe. Only a grand hope like this can lead us into beautiful, life-giving lives like this!

How can you nurture your hope and live a beautiful life today?

Practice for Today: If we really have hope in something, it changes how we live. The Thessalonians lived the values of God’s Reign because they had a real hope in God’s mission and purpose. But, this also works the other way around - when we live the values of God’s Reign, this inspires and strengthens our hope in God’s promise and presence. Today, nurture your hope by living a beautiful life of service, encouragement and joy.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I live with joy, service and courage, O God, I strengthen my hope in your Reign.

Friday 08 December 2017

Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Reflection: Jeremiah’s ministry was one of the longest and hardest of all the prophets. That’s why he is sometimes called “the weeping prophet.” Yet, in the description of his call in today’s reading, God

reassured the young man that God would give him the words and would be with him through it all. Though God promised protection, Jeremiah suffered great persecution, imprisonment and conflict. Nevertheless Jeremiah's experience of being called was that it was not an afterthought by God, but was planned from before the prophet's birth. And the words he spoke were not his own, but were those of God. Some of his words would be comforting and uplifting and some would be confrontational and even destructive. This was because God's Reign always confronts injustice and hatred, while nurturing love and the common good.

Centuries later, John the Baptist proclaimed a similar message - so much so that some of his hearers thought he was Jeremiah reincarnated. Then, when Jesus came along with the same message again, people thought perhaps he was Jeremiah returned. But, there was no need for a specific prophet to come back from the dead. God's message has been essentially the same throughout the ages: those who align themselves with the compassion, generosity, servanthood, and humility of God's Reign are comforted and nurtured. But, those who oppose love and justice find themselves in opposition to God.

God never stops appointing messengers to carry his call and his challenge into the world. Jeremiah and John were just ordinary people, but their lives proclaimed God's word. How is God calling you to be a Jeremiah to your world today?

Practice for Today: God's prophets were masters at using their words to proclaim God's message. But, their words would have meant nothing if their lives had not proclaimed the same message. In the same way, as we seek to share the message of God's grace in Christ, it is not just our words but our lives that matter. Today let your life, and your words, proclaim the grace, love and justice of God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In all I say and all I do, O God, may my life proclaim your word.

Saturday 09 December 2017

Reading: Ezekiel 36:24-28

Reflection: So many people in today's world long to change things

about themselves. Some want to change their appearance, others the amount of money in their bank accounts, and still others their relationships. Millions of dollars are spent every year by people who long to find the secret to making the changes they want. But, while it is never a bad thing to work to become healthier, more deeply connected with others, and more financially responsible, we usually need a power beyond us for real transformation to happen. This is why spiritual experiences in which we encounter God in deep and profound ways can have such a strong impact on the course of our lives.

After centuries of warnings by prophet after prophet, God's people had finally had to face the consequences of their injustice, corruption, and destructiveness. They had been conquered and the leaders had been carried off into exile. The warnings had not been enough to change the people and bring them into alignment with God's ways. But, in today's reading Ezekiel promises the exiles that a time will come when God's people will experience true transformation. They won't do it themselves - it will be the work of God's Spirit. They will be made clean, they will receive new hearts, and God's Spirit will live within them. Of course this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, and now this transformation is available to all.

Where do you long for transformation in your life? How can you receive God's promise and allow God's Spirit to transform you a little more today?

Practice for Today: For us to receive God's transformation, we need to be willing to receive the presence and power of God's Spirit. That's why our worship needs to include moments of invocation when we invite the Spirit to work in us. Today, carry a prayer of invocation on your lips, and allow God's Spirit to do God's transforming work in your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, create a new heart within me and lead me in God's ways.

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