

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
10 - 16 December 2017

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

What message does your life proclaim? Whenever God seeks to do anything in the world, God sends messengers to prepare the hearts of the people. While some of these messengers may be well known or influential figures, others are just ordinary people seeking to live by the values and priorities of Christ as best they can.

In this second week of Advent it is usual to focus on the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, but his story is not just about an event that happened long ago. It is about how God always seeks to restore and heal us, and how God always seeks those who will be carriers of God's message into the world. This means that we are not just witnesses to the story of John's ministry. We are called to be like John, sharing the vision of God's coming into our world, and inviting people into a new, restorative relationship with God.

This week we focus on doing the work of preparing our hearts for God's coming, and also of accepting our calling to be messengers of preparation in our neighbourhoods, homes, and communities.

### **Sunday 10 December 2017**

**Reading:** Mark 1:1-8

**Reflection:** God's people always believed that, before the Messiah arrived to establish God's Reign on earth, God would send a messenger to prepare the way. The Gospel writers all identify this messenger as John the Baptist. John was the bridge between the Old Testament prophets and the new order proclaimed and demonstrated by Jesus. In his dress and message, John echoed the great prophets of the past, and he was seen as the fulfilment of the prophecies of the "voice crying in the wilderness". But, in his announcement of the coming Messiah, John showed that something new was happening. In the act of baptising people, he showed that this new order was not based on ancestry, religious affiliation or national citizenship. It was only a conscious choice to turn away

from the values, priorities and behaviours of the past that could make people part of God's new work. Needless to say this offended the keepers of the status quo.

It is easy to skip over the importance of John's role as a preparer of hearts. In our fast-paced world, we may find ourselves getting frustrated by the idea of preparation. We like to get to the "real thing" as quickly as we can, and the idea that we must wait and prepare for a new move of God can feel like a waste of time. Yet, when we learn the discipline of preparing our hearts - for worship, for Scripture reading, for each day's activities - we discover a greater depth and richness to life, and we learn to recognise the signs of God's coming that we would probably miss in the rush and busyness of life.

What can you do to prepare your heart for the move of God today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the great practices of faith that helps us to open to God's work anew each day is remembering. When we make time to reflect and remember what God has done for us and others in the past, we are more able to open our hearts for what God may be seeking to do in us now. If we have used a journal it can be helpful to go back and read past entries to see what God has done. Today, make time for holy remembering and allow this to prepare your heart for God's new work in your life.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I remember what you have done in my life, O God, I prepare my heart for what you are going to do.

### **Monday 11 December 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 27

**Reflection:** The writer of today's Psalm knows what it is to be in conflict, to be picked on and persecuted, to have enemies who wait for him to fail, and to feel abandoned by God. These experiences of pain and struggle are common to every single person, to a greater or lesser degree. Yet, in the midst of this pain, the writer also knows a sense of confidence, security, joy, and intimacy with God. These experiences of strength, courage and being supported by a power beyond ourselves are also common to every person. The gift of this Psalm, though, is not just the comfort it offers in knowing that our experience of life is normal, but also the hints it gives for how best to navigate the ups and downs that come our way.

The reason for the writer's confidence is that he has found God - not armies, or wealth, or his own intelligence - to be his fortress. He knows that life requires a source of strength and inspiration that is beyond us, and he has found a way to tap into God's presence. He has learned that God is always calling us into intimate conversation and communion, and he has learned how to respond to the whisper of God's Spirit. This means that he has confidence that, even when he feels abandoned, God will never leave him. And, as he seeks direction for his life, he knows he can trust God to teach him how to live. This is why the final words of the Psalm call us to wait patiently for God. It is this waiting that connects us with God's presence, and the wisdom, peace, and security that we find in union with God.

How can you wait for God today, and allow the Spirit to guide and strengthen you?

**Practice for Today:** When we feel overwhelmed by the roller-coaster of life, we may be tempted to rush in to our activities in the hopes that our busyness will make things more manageable. But, this usually just makes us feel even more overwhelmed. When we make time for stillness, we are able to slow our minds down and gain new perspective, and we often find new approaches to our challenges that bring a greater sense of peace. Today, take some time out to be still and allow God's Spirit to speak and guide you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** When I feel overwhelmed, O God, I find peace by becoming still in your presence.

## **Tuesday 12 December 2017**

**Reading:** Acts 11:1-18

**Reflection:** There are two fairly amazing features of Peter's story from today's reading. The first is that Peter's actions were never justified by any appeal to the Bible as they knew it then. When the believers in Jerusalem questioned him, he didn't quote from the Old Testament. He simply described his experience of what he felt was direct guidance by God's Spirit. Yet, the other believers immediately accepted his account and celebrated what had happened, even though it directly contradicted what the law required - that Jews were not supposed to enter the homes of Gentiles and share meals with them (see verse 2-3). But, the second feature is even more

astounding. Notice the various ingredients that came together to bring about this shift in the Church's thinking and practice. There was Peter's unusual dream, repeated three times. Then there was Cornelius' experience of an angelic visitation telling him to call for Peter. And then there was the amazing outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles as they listened to Peter speak. All of these factors together assured the first believers that God's grace in Christ was available not just to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. This was a massive shift in their thinking and it changed the history of the world.

This whole chain of events happened because Peter was willing to be used as God's messenger. He could have ignored his dream. He could have focussed on the potential loss of friends or reputation if it was discovered that he had eaten with Gentiles. He could have allowed his cultural prejudice to stand his way. He could have chosen his own comfort and security. But, because he was willing to take a risk, and reach out to others in Christ's name, so many people's lives were touched by grace, and the Church was shifted to a new course that would impact the entire world.

What risks is God asking you to take to be a messenger of grace?

**Practice for Today:** The idea of sharing faith can be a little frightening. But, when we recognise that the goal of sharing our faith is to bring life to others, as Peter did, it becomes much easier. All we have to do is be present to the needs and longings of those around us and then help them to see through us that God's grace is present to them. Today, try to be aware of the needs of others and be an instrument of God's grace.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I share your grace with others, Jesus, so you make yourself known through me.

## **Wednesday 13 December 2017**

**Reading:** Luke 1:5-17

**Reflection:** Luke is the only Gospel to tell the story of John the Baptist's birth. The writer obviously knew about the prophecies that spoke of Elijah coming before the Messiah, and he wanted to show that John fulfilled these predictions. But, John is not the point. From the beginning John's purpose was to point beyond himself to the Messiah. He was to be the bridge between the Old Testament

prophets and the New order which Jesus established. His ministry showed that Jesus' work was a continuation of the work that God had begun in God's people in the Old Testament, but also that, in Jesus, God was doing something completely new. John was not called to an easy life. He was a change agent, and a person who would confront and challenge the forces that divide people from one another and from God. Yet, as we know, he did this job faithfully and prepared the hearts of the people for Jesus' coming.

When we read about angels visiting John's parents and promising that he would be filled with God's Spirit from birth, it is easy to feel that his task was unique. In one sense it was. The coming of Christ was a unique moment in history and John's job was uniquely related to it. But, in another sense, John was a very ordinary person who had done nothing more than respond to God's call. We are called to prepare our hearts and the hearts of those around for Christ. We are called to challenge the forces that divide us from one another. And we are all called to receive the power of God's Spirit to be faithful witnesses to Christ.

How is God calling you to witness to Jesus today? How can you receive a new infilling of God's Spirit to empower you?

**Practice for Today:** We are all witnesses to something. Our lives speak whether we want them to or not. The only question is what our lives say. If we are to witness to Jesus, we need the Spirit to empower us to be gracious, loving, humble and serving. Today, invite God's Spirit to fill you, guide you and empower you again.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Come. Holy Spirit, fill me and make my life a witness to Jesus.

#### **Thursday 14 December 2017**

**Reading:** Philippians 3:7-11

**Reflection:** It was John the Baptist who famously said, "He must become greater. I must become less." On Sunday we will see again how he pointed away from himself to Jesus and how, when the time came, he willingly moved out of the way for Jesus to take centre stage. In today's reading Paul demonstrates the same humility. While he had previously prioritised his success as a Pharisee, the perfection of obeying the law, and the eradication of anything that

challenged his arrogant view of faith, in Christ he found these things to be worthless. Instead he found value in his relationship with Jesus, in serving others in Christ's name, and in giving himself for the sake of the Gospel.

Verse 10 is one of the most poignant prayers in the New Testament. The apostle speaks of his longing to know Christ and the power of his resurrection life. But, he also speaks of a longing to share in Christ's death - his self-giving - in order to enter into fullness of life. It is a strange prayer that asks for an experience of death and sacrifice. But Paul knew that it was in self-giving, not self-protection or self-aggrandisement, that the most vibrant life is found. The willingness with which New Testament believers gave themselves for Christ is both inspiring and challenging, and it reveals the true nature of our call to be witnesses to Jesus.

How can you share in the death of Christ today, so that you may also share in his resurrection life?

**Practice for Today:** In a world where every individual is now a brand, and social media is the platform for self-promotion on a grand scale, it can be strange to speak of becoming less, and giving ourselves away. Yet, self-giving is the way of Jesus, and it is a choice we must make each day. Today, make the choice to give yourself to others by resisting any self-protective habits, and by being generous with your attention and your time.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I want to know you, Jesus, and to share in your death so that I may experience your life.

#### **Friday 15 December 2017**

**Reading:** Habakkuk 3:2-6

**Reflection:** Like many of the prophets, Habakkuk saw the disaster that was brewing for God's people and he tried to warn them. But, instead of addressing the people directly, his book is written as a dialogue between the prophet and God. He begins questioning why God remains inactive in the face of injustice. Then, when God responds that judgement will come through foreign nations, Habakkuk protests that God should use such instruments to fulfil God's purposes. But, God replies that all these nations will also face their own time of judgement. Today's reading contains part of the

prophet's prayer in which he asks for God's restoration and expresses his assurance that God will rescue God's people. This conversation with God reveals a deep intimacy between Habakkuk and his God, and shows how this relationship gave the prophet confidence and reassurance even in a very dark time.

The first few verses of today's reading begin with praise for God's awe-inspiring works. Then Habakkuk asks God to repeat these same works on behalf of God's people in the present time. His cry for God to remember mercy in the midst of God's anger reveals how much the prophet trusted in God's kindness and grace. These words are important to keep in mind as we read the description of God that follows. In the midst of glory, there is also the image of clouds of pestilence and plague going before and behind God. This speaks of the belief of the time that God directly controlled disease and used it for his judgement. The prophet used this picture to show that God is in authority over all things. In Jesus we see this authority being revealed in a very different way - through his ministry of healing. The point of Habakkuk's prophecy, and the message we need to hear again today, is that God is always coming to us in the midst of our suffering. God is not inactive in the face of injustice, but works in and through people to bring restoration and healing to the world. This is the Advent message we celebrate.

How can you express your confidence and trust in God's kindness and grace, even as you celebrate God's awe-inspiring glory?

**Practice for Today:** Although Habakkuk saw God's judgement coming he ended his prophecy with a commitment to praise God even should he lose everything. Praise lifts us above our circumstances and reminds us of God's presence and grace. Let your praises lift you today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Even in the darkest times I praise you, O God, and trust in your gracious presence.

## **Saturday 16 December 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 126

**Reflection:** Today's reading is one of the group of Psalms known as songs of ascent (or pilgrimage). These were Psalms that were sung as the people processed up to the Temple for worship. Today's

Psalm adds a dramatic note to this theme by speaking of the returning exiles who came home to Jerusalem after years away. For them, the procession had been a long and arduous journey, but it finally brought them to the place of worship. There is a wonderful parallel between this literal journey and the figurative journey that we all share in life. The struggles and griefs that we experience in our lives are part of our journey, but ultimately our goal is find communion with God and to know life and rest in God's presence.

While this Psalm speaks of the joy and singing of the returning exiles, we know from other sources that this euphoria wore off after a while. Once the reality of the devastation of their nation hit home, the returned exiles became despondent and despaired that they would ever be able to rebuild their lives. That's why the last three verses of the Psalm offer a plea for God's restoration, and a promise of a joyful harvest. In our toughest times we need to remember God's presence and God's strength. If we allow despair to overtake us, we will lose ourselves and find that we are unable to do the work necessary to find life. But, when we remember that we have a source of strength beyond ourselves, we are able to lean into God's Spirit and allow God to carry us through. This promise of God's presence and grace is the wonderful reminder of the Advent season.

How can you live your life as a journey into God's strengthening presence today?

**Practice for Today:** The gift of prayer is that it reminds us that God is with us and that God's presence and power are available to sustain and strengthen us. The power of prayer is even more powerful when we pray not just for ourselves but for others as well. Today lift up any areas of struggle in your own life to God. But, don't forget to pray for others around you as well.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I pray for myself and others, O God, I remember your grace and presence and I find strength.

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