

## ***Sacredise Daily***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
21-27 January 2018

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

This week the Scriptures invite us to consider a rather radical idea – that God seeks to include us in what God is doing in the world! It's not just that God is involved in our lives, or that God sometimes steps in to bring salvation to the universe. Rather, God actively recruits ordinary human beings like you and me to participate in the creative, saving work of Christ. What makes this even more astounding is that God allows us to choose whether we will accept the invitation or not.

You may have heard the story of Jonah in church this week. After hearing God's call and running away, Jonah was finally convinced by God that he should obey and preach to the people of Nineveh. On hearing his message, the people repented, and the judgement God had planned for them was averted. Or perhaps you heard the story of the fishermen that Jesus called to be his disciples. Notice how Jesus used what they were already good at – fishing – in his call to them. They didn't have to become something other than what they were. They only needed to use their gifts and talents for God's work, and not just their own gain.

There are two challenges in these stories. The first is to recognise that God has a job for every one of us. God doesn't just want to save us. God wants to use us as God's instruments to bring wholeness and peace, grace and justice, into the world! The second challenge is that, as we respond to God's call, we will need to learn to align our priorities with God's – to use our gifts and abilities for God's purposes, not our own. But, if we accept the call, and align our priorities with God's, we discover a life that is full, meaningful, liberating, and adventurous. Are you ready to be part of this amazing journey?

### **Sunday 21 January 2018**

**Reading:** Mark 1:14-20

**Reflection:** The calling of the fisherman is such a well known story that it's easy to just gloss over it and miss any new thing God may want to say to us. Perhaps you'd like to read it again slowly, and allow the words to sink into your heart in a fresh way.

Two truths stand out in this passage. The first is that God uses us as we are. God has gifted us and equipped us with talents, resources and abilities, and when God calls us, it is these gifts that God asks us to use. As Frederick Buechner once said, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." The second truth is that God always calls us into a community. Notice here that Jesus didn't just call one person, but a whole group. In fact, Jesus' disciples ended up being a really diverse and difficult bunch. But he called them to learn to love one another – even when the "one another" included people they would naturally have hated!

How is God asking you to use your gifts for God's purposes? How can you respond to this call? How can you commit more deeply to being part of a called community today?

**Practice for Today:** There's a simple, but powerful practice that helps us to answer both the call to use our gifts for God and the call to community – giving. Today, try to find ways to use your abilities for the sake of others with no expectation or desire for gain, reciprocation or reward. Watch how this connects you with others, and fills your day with purpose.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have gifted me, O God, use me for your purpose.

### **Monday 22 January 2018**

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

**Reflection:** It can be a great temptation to think that we cannot effectively serve God because we are not like others. Clergy may, at times, wonder if they could serve better out in the "marketplace" like the congregants, while the congregants may be wishing that they could serve God with the single-mindedness of the clergy. Sometimes, this sense of inadequacy may even become an excuse for not serving at all.

When we begin to recognise God's call on our lives, it is natural to wonder whether we should change who we are and what we do for God's sake. But, today's passage from the first letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that this is not necessary. Some may be called to some new season in their lives, but this doesn't apply to everyone. It is more common for God to ask us to perform our ministry where we are and as we are. Even Jesus' disciples did not stop being fishermen. They just used their fishing skill differently!

Who has God made you to be? How can you use who you are and where you are as a ministry for the sake of Christ?

**Practice for Today:** One of the best ways to remember that we don't need to make huge changes in order to serve God is to take note of the gifts and opportunities that God has given us right where we are. The practice of thanksgiving is a good way to do this. Try to make thanksgiving a constant part of every facet of your day today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Thank you God that you call me to serve you as I am and where I am.

### **Tuesday 23 January 2018**

**Reading:** Acts 5:33-42

**Reflection:** As much as it can be tempting to think we need to change to serve God – as we explored yesterday – it can also be tempting to insist that others change to serve God the way we think they should. But, when we do this, when we make our agendas more important than God's surprising creativity, we often miss the new things that God is doing among us.

This was the challenge of the religious leaders who persecuted the disciples in the growing church in Acts. God had done a new and surprising thing in Christ, but they couldn't see it because they were married to their own ideas and ways. But, one wise leader, Gamaliel, was more open than the others, and recognised that God could well be at work where they didn't expect it. And so he advised caution and faith, reminding his companions that if God were not working in the church it would die out, but if the church survived, they would have to acknowledge that they were fighting against God.

Are there any people or activities that you are resisting in your life or church? Have you considered that it may be God at work? How can you open yourself to this possibility and give others the freedom to serve in their own way?

**Practice for Today:** We miss God when we get too caught up in our own perspectives. To avoid this, we need to fill our lives with God's perspective, and I can think of no better way to do this than to practice praise. Why not make praise a theme for today?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your surprising and mysterious work in my life and in my world.

### **Wednesday 24 January 2018**

**Reading:** Mark 3:13-19a

**Reflection:** This reading may seem strange today – a list of the names of those whom Jesus called to be his apostles. What makes this list startling, though, is when you begin to realise what an unlikely bunch this was. Certainly, if Jesus had employed a Human Resources manager, this disparate and divisive group would never have been created! The new community which Jesus began with the two sets of brothers – Peter and Andrew, and James and John (whom Jesus called the “Sons of Thunder” because of their intense sibling rivalry) – now included a tax collector (hated by other Jews for “selling out” to the Romans), a zealot (a freedom fighter opposed to Roman rule and seeking to overthrow it by force), a Pharisee (who would have hated and been hated by the previous two), and miscellaneous others of different backgrounds. The first few weeks of living with this bunch must have been both frightening and frustrating! Yet, it is this strange collection of people that Jesus called to be the first to embody his message of God's Reign, and whom he commanded to love one another.

One thing is certain, as we reflect on what this means for us: we do not get to choose the people we will have to live with in God's Reign. Rather, God calls us to connect with those we are least likely to befriend, and to do the tough work of learning to love them. Only when we have truly understood and accepted this call have we really become followers of Christ, and only then can we truly say that we have learned to love.

Who may God be asking you to learn to love today? What can you do to start this journey?

**Practice for Today:** A good way to learn to love others is to pray for them. It's very hard to stay disconnected from those you really grow compassionate toward through prayer. Today take time to pray especially for the people you find it most difficult to love.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Teach me, O God, to love and welcome others as you have loved and welcomed me.

### **Thursday 25 January 2018**

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 3:23-29

**Reflection:** The story of Moses is a poignant one. After all the years of hardship and leadership, he finally brings God's people to the borders of the Promised Land, but he himself is not permitted to enter. This heartbreaking reality seems rather unfair to the great man. The writer of this part of the Scriptures describes this as a judgement of God, but perhaps there was something else going on as well.

The entry to the Promised Land marked a new phase in Israel's life. It was a new generation entering the land (the one that left Egypt had died in the wilderness). These two factors meant that new leadership would be necessary, and for this leadership to succeed, the old leadership (Moses) would need to step aside. Already there had been signs that Moses' patience was wearing thin (when he struck the rock in frustration with the people to get water, instead of speaking to it as God had instructed). So, perhaps God was simply telling Moses that it was time to step down. Of course Moses would have found this hard – it would have felt like a punishment – but for Joshua and the new generation to have the best chance at success in their new home, Moses had to move aside.

This Sunday the question of authority, and what it looks like in Jesus, may be raised. This call for Moses to relinquish his authority is typical of the way power is handled in God's Reign. Are there any places in your own life where you may need to let go or step aside so that God can work better in and through others?

**Practice for Today:** Today's reading calls for a different kind of

response – a practice that is hard for most of us, but also crucial to learn. This practice is letting go. Whenever you feel the need to impose your "authority", your will or your agenda on others, it is a good idea to step back, and then let go, trusting God for the results. Try this today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Teach me, O God, to let go and to step aside when needed, to serve when needed and to trust you with the outcome.

### **Friday 26 January 2018**

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 12:28-32

**Reflection:** As the people of Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses, knowing that he would not go with them, reviewed the law in what is now the book of Deuteronomy. The plan for the people was for them to inhabit the land, wipe out the existing peoples (so as not to be influenced by them), and establish a new nation under God's rulership. This sounds harsh to us today, but they didn't have the benefit of Jesus' revelation of God. Moses was concerned that the people would be led astray and so he made one last attempt to convince them to stay faithful. Of course even this didn't work completely and the people often turned away from God. But there was always the promise that a prophet like Moses would come and turn them back.

When Jesus came on the scene some thought he was the promised prophet, but he showed that he was far more than that! The call to faithfulness remains, though. There are always temptations to build our lives around the things that others tell us are important. It is all too easy to lose sight of God's Reign and the life it calls us to. As for the people about to enter the Promised Land, so Moses' call to work on staying faithful is important and challenging for us today – and it does take work to stay mindful, aware and intentional about our faith.

In what ways are you tempted to adopt the ways of the world around you? How can you stay focussed on the life God offers you today?

**Practice for Today:** Today's reading calls for a renewed commitment to God's ways. The truth is that this is something we

can and should do every day. Today, though, you might want to make a special dedication of yourself to Christ. Especially in those moments when you find yourself drawn to something other than God's ways, it's good to affirm your commitment again.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** All that I have and all that I am I dedicate to you again, Dear Jesus.

### **Saturday 27 January 2018**

**Reading:** Matthew 8:28-9:1

**Reflection:** In church tomorrow, you may be reading another story of Jesus healing someone oppressed by a demon. We'll certainly be reflecting on that passage in the Daily Worship guide tomorrow. Today's reading prepares us by inviting us to reflect on the strange event described in Matthew's Gospel. Here there are two men who are violently insane because of the evil that has taken hold of them. But, Jesus liberates them and drives the demons into a herd of unclean (for the Jews) swine. Strangely, though, the people of the nearby town are frightened by this demonstration of Jesus' liberating authority and ask him to leave.

Even though we know that Jesus does not abuse his authority, as we are so tempted to do, we can be reluctant to submit to his rule in our lives. Even though we can see how Jesus liberates us and others, we sometimes prefer to remain imprisoned because we are afraid of the responsibility that freedom brings. And when we ask Jesus to leave us alone, he graciously agrees. Unfortunately for us, though, we lose the chance to experience God's life and to be people who bring life and freedom to others. It's a high price to pay.

Are there any places in your life where you are resisting Jesus' liberating grace? Do you know why? What would it take for you to open yourself to freedom?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes we feel that being part of Christ's liberating work means doing "great things" for God, but sometimes proclaiming Christ's freedom doesn't even require us to speak! One of the best ways we can find and share freedom is by listening – to the whisper of God's Spirit in our hearts, and to the cries of others. Today, try to be someone who shares God's love through listening.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Use me, O God, as your instrument to bring freedom to others.