

## ***Sacredise Daily***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
28 January – 03 February 2018

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

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘authority’? This week the question of authority – what it is, who has it and how to use it – may have come up in your worship services. Even if it didn’t form the theme for your gathering, there is no question that authority related issues were at work in your church. They are also at work in every other part of your life, from your family to your friendships to your work life. The workings of authority structures have always been part of human experience, and, when it comes to God’s Reign, they are unavoidable.

If you heard the reading from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:15-20) in Church this Sunday, you would have heard a promise from Moses that was treasured by the Israelites for centuries – one day a prophet would come to God’s people who would be “like Moses”. This is why some people thought Jesus was “the Prophet” (John 7:40). But, when Jesus taught, healed and cast out demons (as in Mark 1:21-28), the people exclaimed that he had a greater authority than the religious leaders. They soon began to realise that this was not a “prophet like Moses” but one far greater!

Jesus’ authority amazed people, largely because it was a different kind of authority than any they had known. It was the authority of liberation – setting oppressed people free. It was also the authority of service – healing, forgiving, restoring service. For Jesus authority is not domination or “power over”. Nor is it manipulation or “power under”. No, for Jesus authority is collaboration or “power with”. It is an authority derived from God’s Reign, and it’s one in which we are invited to participate. This week we’ll explore what that might mean for us.

### **Sunday 28 January 2018**

**Reading:** Mark 1:21-28

**Reflection:** One of the reasons Jesus made such an impact on people is that he practiced what he preached. When he proclaimed that God’s Reign was available and accessible, he showed it to be true by his actions. When he embraced the leper, healed the sick and cast out demons, Jesus was showing that a new reality really was being manifest in the world. What Jesus taught and how he lived were in complete alignment, and this meant that his message had authority.

Unfortunately too many people expect to get authority from their position - as CEO, or as politician, or as parent - but feel no need to back it up with integrity. Then they are surprised when people resist their leadership. On some level we are all called to be leaders - in our families, our work places, among our circle of friends, or even just over ourselves. But, unless we are willing to live with integrity - allowing our actions, our words, and our ‘position’ to be one - we will never lead effectively.

Where are you called to exercise authority? How can you ensure that your authority flows out of your integrity?

**Practice for Today:** Integrity cannot be found without knowing ourselves – our strengths and values, and our weaknesses and temptations. The best practice for self-knowledge is self-examination, coupled with a regular discipline of confession, recognising where change is necessary and committing to it. Today, take time to know your own heart, and work on your integrity.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Jesus, may my thoughts, words and actions all be one, even as yours were one.

### **Monday 29 January 2018**

**Reading:** Numbers 22:1-21

**Reflection:** It may sound strange to talk about a prophet who lacked integrity, but that’s exactly what Balaam was. As the people of Israel got closer to the Promised Land at the end of their wilderness wanderings, the king of Moab, who was afraid of them because of the way they had defeated other armies, called for Balaam to come and curse them. When Balaam asked God if he should go, God told him clearly not to. But, when the king sent a second delegation,

offering to pay him handsomely, Balaam suddenly had to check with God again, and this time he heard 'God' say he could go. Sounds like a crisis of integrity to me!

As we seek to follow Christ there will often be temptations that will challenge our convictions, our values, and our commitment to God's ways. It is all too easy to try and justify doing what we want, but in the end we know that we have violated our integrity. The challenge is to stay faithful to God's call even when no one is watching. It was this kind of integrity that ensured that even the forces of evil could not resist Jesus' authority!

Where is your integrity being challenged at the moment? How can you make a new commitment to staying faithful to Jesus and to your own convictions?

**Practice for Today:** Commitment is a difficult word for many, but it is the essence of integrity. When we practice commitment - following through on what we believe and promise - we are living as Christ did, as people of integrity. Today, identify the commitments God has called you to make, and embrace them as a gift.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Keep me faithful, O God, to your ways.

### **Tuesday 30 January 2018**

**Reading:** Numbers 22:22-28

**Reflection:** The Balaam saga continues today. After justifying his decision to go with the messengers of the king of Moab, Balaam discovers that his lack of integrity has a price - he loses his authority as a prophet, even over his own donkey! What Balaam discovers, to his shame, is that his donkey is more perceptive than he is. His donkey becomes disobedient because he can see the angel of God (looking very threatening) where Balaam can see nothing. But, now Balaam is committed to his misguided course of action, and so, instead of listening and learning, he simply beats his donkey. In the end, though, through a very strange and surprising conversation with his animal, Balaam sees the light. From the following verses we learn that Balaam finally did get to the king of Moab, but when he tried to curse Israel, all that came out of his mouth was blessing!

It's amazing that God would be so committed to God's people that

God would go to these lengths to ensure that they were blessed and not cursed. But, of course, this is nothing compared with the incarnation - with God becoming human, serving us, and liberating us in Jesus. The other amazing truth that emerges from Balaam's story is that God recruits people like you and me (and even some donkeys at times!) to participate in serving and liberating the world.

Are there places in your life where you have set your mind on a course of action that may not be in line with the values of God's Reign? Or are you struggling to stay true to any "Kingdom commitments" you have made? How can you open yourself to God's strength to help you stay faithful?

**Practice for Today:** There is no better way to draw on God's strength, presence, and inspiration than the practice of praise. As we lose ourselves in wonder at God's goodness and love, we automatically find ourselves drawing strength from this gracious God of ours. Try to remember to give praise at all times today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your presence, your strength, and your grace that always sustain me.

### **Wednesday 31 January 2018**

**Reading:** Jeremiah 29:1-14

**Reflection:** The people of Israel, after years of disobedience and ignoring the words of God's prophets, had been carried off into exile in Babylon. Some of the exiles believed that God had forsaken them entirely, and that they were now irreparably lost. Others were listening to the words of prophets who were telling them - as they wanted to hear - that this was just a temporary setback, and things would get back to normal very soon.

Jeremiah, however, had a word from God that was both comforting and challenging. He spoke with the authority of one who cared for the people, lived with integrity, and was totally submitted to God. His word was that God had not abandoned them, but was with them even in their exile. But, it was not to be a quick holiday - they would be away from their home for a long time. So, he encouraged them to settle, to build lives for themselves and their children, and to contribute to the prosperity of their new home. Beneath it all was a

promise – God’s desires to give God’s people a future and a hope.

Who are the people you listen to the most? Do they have the authority that comes from submission to God, love for others, and personal integrity? When you offer guidance to others, do you speak with this authority? Or, are there places where you just say - or listen for - what you and others want to hear? Can you trust God’s promises even when they seem not to be coming to fulfilment?

**Practice for Today:** Authority is not the ability to lord it over others, but to serve them - as Jesus did. One of the best ways to serve others, and to grow our integrity as we do - is to develop a practice of loving prayer. Who needs a word of hope and an assurance of God’s hopeful purpose in their lives? Pray for them today - and perhaps be the voice of hope as well.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Teach me to bring hope to others by loving and serving them as you have done for me.

#### **Thursday 01 February 2018**

**Reading:** Galatians 5:2-15

**Reflection:** This week we have been exploring the liberating, serving authority of Christ. As we begin now to prepare for the Sunday coming, we are invited to see how far that loving, gracious service goes, as Christ meets both individuals and whole communities at their point of need. Today’s reading is a challenge to the Galatian Church who had begun following Christ in the ways of faith and loving service, but had then begun to allow themselves to be led back into a life of law and judgement. But, even though they had begun to question Paul’s integrity and his ministry, he remained committed to them, writing a loving, but strong, call for them to return to the freedom of faith in Christ and serving one another in love.

It is all too easy to allow our faith to become a religion of law and judgement, denouncing those who don’t live up to our standards, and closing ourselves off from the world. But, we serve a God who went out of God’s way to love and serve us - becoming as one of us, in spite of the cost, to save us. Paul embodies this grace and love in his own ministry as he writes to a church that includes some of his

opponents, inviting them back into the freedom of true, Christ-following faith.

Are their places in your life where law has begun to crowd out love and grace? Have you begun to see your task as judging others rather than serving them? How can you respond to Paul’s call back to faith and loving service in your own life today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the best metaphors for the way God loves and serves us is the image of a host/ess. As God welcomes us to God’s table, so God serves us and watches over us, ensuring that we are well cared for. Today, why not embrace the practice of “host/essing” - welcoming others, serving them and caring for their well-being?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Empower me, Dear Christ, to truly and graciously welcome and serve others in your name.

#### **Friday 02 February 2018**

**Reading:** Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

**Reflection:** The Psalmist has good reason to celebrate. Everywhere the songwriter looks there is evidence of God’s grace and restoration at work. God’s people, who had been conquered and exiled, were now being restored and returning to their homeland. But, it is clear that God isn’t only concerned for the needs of the community. God’s care extends to individuals as well - the broken-hearted and humble. Further, God’s grace is even touching creation. Stars and animals are also the beneficiaries of God’s care. With all of this evidence of God’s compassion and love, how could God’s people do anything but give thanks?

It’s easy to forget, especially in the tough times, that God does not forget us or stop caring for us. Sometimes we may begin to wonder whether God has time for us, with all the suffering in the world. But, today’s reading assures us that God is perfectly capable of caring for the entire planet, while still staying present and available for the least significant individual. We do well to remember this, and learn to trust it.

How can you re-affirm your faith in God’s personal care for you today?

**Practice for Today:** There is no better way to keep ourselves mindful of God's love and compassion than to take stock of the ways we have been touched and blessed by God and to give thanks for all the grace we receive. Try to find as many opportunities as you can to give thanks today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** O God, I remember and give thanks for all the blessings I have received.

### **Saturday 03 February 2018**

**Reading:** Matthew 12:9-14

**Reflection:** Tomorrow in Church you may read an account from Mark's Gospel of Jesus healing both a specific individual, and a whole community of people. Today's reading from Matthew tells another healing story, but this one has a dark side to it. On the one hand, we see Jesus healing a man with a damaged hand. But, on the other side, we see the religious leaders waiting to use Jesus' compassion against him. The setting for this story is the synagogue - the place of worship - and it is the Sabbath. No work is to be done on the Sabbath, and in the tradition of which these leaders were a part, healing had somehow come to be seen as work that was forbidden. They are also threatened by Jesus and his teaching, and so they ignore the suffering of this man, and try to trick Jesus into a blatant disregard for their law so that they can have an excuse to get rid of him.

It's sad when our need to be "right" or "pure" obscures God's compassion. Perhaps you've experienced this when those who claim to follow Christ have pointed judging fingers at you for something you couldn't help, or for some difference of opinion. Maybe you've had times when the pointing fingers have been yours. What can we learn from Jesus, who, in spite of the attacks of the religious leaders, still performs the healing, "bending" (or re-interpreting) the law in the process? How can you prioritize compassion over law in your own life?

**Practice for Today:** At the end of every worship service there is (or should be) a "benediction" - literally a "good word" or a word of blessing. Speaking blessing over people is a powerful and healing practice, but it's not just about the words. The intention to seek the

best for the one we bless is also important. Why not make today a "benedicting" day?

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** Dear Jesus, let your blessing rest on me and others today, I pray.

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