

Sacredise Daily

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
04 - 10 February 2018

Thought for the Week:

Sometimes, as followers of Christ from different traditions, we get into conflict over how faith works. Is God a personal God seeking individual commitment? Can we serve God effectively on our own without a faith community? Or does God work through groups – churches, communities, families? Must we belong to some congregation in order to be faithful to Christ? Through the centuries, Christian teachers have emphasized one or the other, but perhaps we do ourselves a disservice when we make these two possibilities a choice.

This Sunday we read that Jesus goes home with Simon where Simon's mother-in-law is very ill and Jesus heals her. It's a touching story of remarkable particularity in Jesus' ministry. It reveals his care for and commitment to the individuals who had chosen to follow him. There is no question, when we read this story, that God is a personal God, available to each of us individually. But, then, immediately after this story, we discover the whole community gathering at the door of the house – bringing their needs to Jesus. And, again, with this nameless crowd, Jesus is present, available, and compassionate. Finally, after taking some time out to recharge, the disciples tell Jesus that people are looking for him, but he tells them that they must continue on to other villages in the region to minister to others. It's like the Gospel writer wants to show us how Jesus' ministry moved so comfortably from the individual to the community to the country. Jesus did not choose between individuals and communities. He embraced both.

There are challenges and benefits to both personal spirituality and to communal worship, and I believe that in some form we all need both. This week, you may want to explore how you can bring your personal worship and your public worship together as you seek to love and follow Christ.

Sunday 04 February 2018

Reading: Mark 1:29-39

Reflection: It is encouraging to see how Jesus moved so easily from serving a friend's mother-in-law to serving a whole town. Perhaps we can't all do this. Some of us are, perhaps, more able to serve one-on-one, bringing God's grace to individuals one at a time. In this way, we represent one aspect of Christ's grace to others. Others of us may be more effective at serving groups, but find one-on-one ministry difficult. In this way, we represent the other aspect of Christ's grace. Both of these are valid and valuable ways to serve. When we can partner with each other, so that both individuals and groups are well served, then we are able to more fully embody Christ's message and grace. This is one of the reasons why the Church remains an important organisation.

However we may serve, though, it's important to take note of the fact that even Jesus needed to take time out by himself to pray, to rest, and to recharge his energies. When we fail to manage our health like this, our ministry will inevitably begin to lose its effectiveness. We do well, though, when we follow Christ's example, and make time for the things that restore us. Then, when we have recharged, we can return to service with enthusiasm and strength.

How best do you serve God and others - in groups, or one-on-one? How can you do more of this today? And, as you serve, how can you make time to rest and recharge?

Practice for Today: At the start of our worship, we often employ a practice that opens us to God's restoring, energising Spirit. It's called "invocation" and it means to call on God's Spirit to move among us and within us again. Today, why not try invoking the Spirit of God whenever you need wisdom, guidance, energy, or grace to serve?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, empower me again that I may serve faithfully as you call me to.

Monday 05 February 2018

Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-17, 32-37

Reflection: The story of today's reading is a moving one. A kind,

but childless, woman and her husband have used their wealth to serve Elisha, even before they suspected he was a prophet. Then, when the son Elisha promised them dies, he heals the child and restores him to his grateful parents. It's a miraculous, touching story. But, it also carries the struggle that not all of our prayers are answered so dramatically. Sometimes the only answer we receive is the ability to find grace and joy even when our prayers aren't answered.

But, there is another important message in today's reading. It's hard to miss the compassion that Elisha shows toward this couple, and the commitment he has to bless them for their kindness. As a prophet, Elisha represents God's grace and compassion, and reveals to us how deeply concerned God is with each of our lives. Even when we endure great hardship, we can rest in the assurance that God's grace and presence are with us, and that God travels with us through our dark times. And, when others are struggling, we have the opportunity to be the "prophets" of God's grace to support and care for them.

Where can you see God's presence and compassion at work in your life? How can you be a "prophet of grace" to someone today?

Practice for Today: One of the easiest and best ways to show your care for others, and to open yourself to God's care for you, is to use the twin practices of intercession (praying for others) and petition (praying for yourself). As you pray, ask God if there's a way you can be the answer to your own prayers. Then, as you find a way to be the channel of God's grace and compassion, do what your heart is moved to do.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me to care for others, O God, as you always care for me.

Tuesday 06 February 2018

Reading: Acts 15:36-41

Reflection: Two things stand out in this short passage of Scripture today. The first is that there were disputes among friends in the New Testament Church even as there are among us today. It seems strange to think of Paul and Barnabas - these two great followers of

Jesus - having such a strong disagreement that they can no longer travel together. But, in spite of this, we know from Paul's letters, that they resolved things later. When he was in jail, Paul asked for Mark to be sent to him saying he would be helpful in Paul's ministry.

The cause of the dispute was that Barnabas wanted Mark to be included in their planned trip, but Paul refused because Mark had failed them in the past. Barnabas, it seems, found forgiveness easier than Paul, and was committed to restoring and supporting the young Mark. No wonder the apostles had nicknamed him Barnabas - "son of encouragement"!

Perhaps you have a relationship that has broken down because of some dispute. Could it be time to forgive and restore? Or perhaps God is calling you to be a support to someone who has failed or been rejected and needs an encourager? How can you answer these calls today?

Practice for Today: Today's practice is to be a "repairer" using the acts of repentance and forgiveness to reconcile with those with whom your relationships have broken down, and to support and heal those who are struggling after some failure or rejection. Try to allow God's healing presence to be felt through you today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Make me a channel of your healing, forgiving peace, O God.

Wednesday 07 February 2018

Reading: Job 6:1-13

Reflection: This may be a difficult passage for you to read today. Certainly, it's not the "happy" or "uplifting" kind of reading that we usually enjoy. But, perhaps Job's painful cry to God resonates with your own experience. We all go through times of great suffering, or we journey with friends and loved ones who do. In those times it is natural to question God's presence and care. But, all too often we feel guilty expressing anger at God, and so we hide our pain behind nice, "spiritual" masks. Job doesn't do that. He is completely honest with God, allowing his pain, anger, and despair to show in his prayers, and he doesn't rush to quick and easy answers to his questions.

Sometimes we can only know God's grace and healing when we are willing to hold our unanswered questions and not try to avoid them. Sometimes we can only experience God's presence when we are ready to be honest with God about our anger and despair, and when we acknowledge our doubts and the feeling that even God has abandoned or betrayed us. Sometimes it's when we rush to find answers and solutions that we miss the healing and strength that we really need from God. There's a word for this practice of "shaking our fists at God" - and it's a good, right, and biblically encouraged practice. It's called "Lament".

What laments do you need to express to God today - for yourself or for someone else? Can you let go of quick answers, or your fear of not being "good," and just let your true feelings out, trusting God to be able to take them and love you through them?

Practice for Today: As you may already have guessed, today's practice is lament. In every moment when you see injustice, when you feel angry or when you witness or experience suffering, allow yourself to express your grief in prayer.

Breath-Prayer for Today: O God, why do you delay your healing and justice?

Thursday 08 February 2018

Reading: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Reflection: We begin now to move into the last part of the Epiphany season. In a few days we will gather for Ash Wednesday, and then move into the discipline and penitence of the Lenten season. But, before we get there, we must first journey with Jesus and his disciples to the top of a mountain and witness the glory of the Transfiguration. Today we begin our preparation for our celebration of this amazing event.

In Paul's letter we read that followers of Christ are called to "spread the knowledge of Christ". We often understand this to be about *telling* other people about our faith and challenging them to make a commitment to Christ. But, here the Apostle speaks of the "fragrance" of our lives. It's not only about our words, but about how we live. Some people will react negatively to the grace and justice of

God. But, for many people, the thing that will make the biggest difference is when they experience God's presence and love - God's "fragrance" - through who we are, what we do, and how we treat them. In this way we become those who reveal God's glory to the world.

In what ways does your life spread the fragrance of Christ? How can you grow this characteristic in your life?

Practice for Today: If we seek to reflect the glory of God, we need to open ourselves to see and experience God's glory. The practice of praise is designed to do exactly this for us. Today, seek to praise God in all things, not just through your words, but through God-honouring actions and attitudes as well.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you for your glory, O God, which always seeks to be revealed in me and in the world.

Friday 09 February 2018

Reading: Psalm 50:1-6

Reflection: We easily pray to see God's glory, and so we should! But, we may not be aware of the implications of our prayers. Today's Psalm shows us that God is always seeking to reveal God's self to us, and make God's glory known. But, when God is seen or experienced in a new way, the world changes - or at least, it changes for us. In a similar way, we are changed - we are "judged". This is less about God "punishing" us, and more about how God's glory evaluates or measures us, exposing both the good and the not so good in us.

If we seek encounters with God we need to recognise that our experience of God will challenge us. We must be willing to have our goodness revealed and to receive a call to continue to be "in covenant" with God. We must also be willing to have our "injustices" exposed, and for God to challenge us to live in ways that are more closely aligned with God's justice.

Are you ready to encounter God in this way? In what ways can you prepare your heart to be more open to true, transforming encounters with God?

Practice for Today: In order to encounter God's glory, we often need to wait on God, and meditate on God's presence. Then, as we open ourselves to God through silence and stillness, our awareness of God and God's glory grows, leading us to an experience of encounter with God. Today, make time to meditate on God and wait for God's glory to be revealed to you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I wait on you, show me your glory, O God.

Saturday 10 February 2018

Reading: Luke 19:41-44

Reflection: The Gospel of Luke gives us a glimpse into Jesus' heart as he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. There may have been celebration and singing, but for Jesus there was grief. God had been revealed to God's people in so many ways over the centuries. God's ways had been taught and God's peace and justice proclaimed. Now, through the ministry of Jesus, God's Reign had been revealed as never before. However, in spite of all this, the people had failed to recognise God's presence among them. They had failed to see and embrace the values of peace and justice that would bring life to God's people and, through them, to the world. Jesus grieves because this "blindness" has consequences. Ultimately, since they have rejected peace, they will become victims of war - defeated, conquered, and vulnerable.

Seeing God's glory is about more than just having a blessed experience of God's presence and love. It is also about being changed into carriers of God's justice and peace. When we fail to recognise this, we actually miss God's glory altogether. But, when we embrace the transforming challenge of God's glory, we become channels of God's peace, justice, grace and compassion to the world.

Where in your life do you still have blind spots to God's glory? Where is God's glory challenging you to change, and become a

channel for healing to others? How can you open yourself to this manifestation of God's glory today?

Practice for Today: When we leave our worship gatherings we often receive a benediction - a good word - that invites us to take the vision of God that we have enjoyed in our worship out into the world. Each day we can continue this "benedicting" in our own lives, opening us to the possibilities for God's presence, justice and healing in our corner of the world. Why not practice speaking "good words" through the day?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Let me see your glory and let others see your healing glory through me.

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