

Sacredise Daily

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
18 – 24 February 2018

Thought for the Week:

This first Sunday of Lent always invites us to reflect on the start of Jesus' ministry, on his baptism, and especially on his temptations. What is interesting this year is that the Gospel of Mark, which is the focus Gospel (along with John) this year, spends very little time on the baptism and temptation narratives. Mark is eager to get to the start of Jesus' ministry, to the announcement that God's Reign has arrived and is accessible to all.

However, Mark also knows that the ministry of Jesus, like all of those who seek to follow Jesus, needs preparation. In Jesus' case, God prepares him in two ways. The first, which happened at his baptism, was the anointing with God's Spirit and the affirming voice of God that proclaimed Jesus as God's beloved Son in whom God was pleased. The second way Jesus was prepared for ministry was far less attractive – the testing in the wilderness. Note, that it is God who "drives" Jesus to this time of trial. The reason for this was that, in order to fulfil his calling, Jesus needed to know himself honestly and thoroughly. If there was no desire in Jesus, no thought that perhaps he could do things differently than the way God asked, then this was not a real temptation. There must have been the possibility that he could fail – and he needed to see that possibility in himself, or he would not have had the strength to face the cross when the time came.

We need to be prepared for our tasks in the same way. We also receive God's Spirit and God's affirmation. But we also need to face our temptations. This week, we will be exploring the way in which God calls us to follow Christ in service of God's Reign.

Sunday 18 February 2018

Reading: Mark 1:9-15

Reflection: Mark's account of Jesus' baptism and temptation is very sparse. There is no discussion with John about who should baptise

whom. There is no listing of the three temptations. Mark wants to get to the proclamation of the Reign of God as quickly as possible. But, in all of this brevity, it is strange that Mark includes one small detail – after Jesus was tempted, he was cared for by angels and wild animals!

This detail is more significant than it may appear at first. Right before Mark narrates Jesus' message, he gives a glimpse of what the Reign of God that Jesus will preach looks like – and it's an exciting vision. Angels and wild animals caring for a human being! It's a picture of a world healed and made one. Natural and "supernatural" beings together, humanity and the natural world living in harmony – this is what God wants the world to be. And this is what Jesus was calling us to when he preached about God's Reign.

It can be tempting to make the Reign of God about going to some other place (heaven) after we die. But, this is not the Reign of God that Jesus preached. The Reign of God that is proclaimed by Jesus in the Gospels is here and now. It embraces the earth and its creatures. It includes all people, and all things. And it seeks to bring the entire cosmos into wholeness and unity in Christ.

How can you embrace this unified world today? What person or creature needs you to care for them?

Practice for Today: When we are given a vision like this of God's dreams, there can only really be one response - praise. Today, keep this vision in your mind by praising God for God's Reign at every opportunity.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your all-encompassing Reign, and for including me in it.

Monday 19 February 2018

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Reflection: This was the passage of Scripture, apparently, that released Martin Luther from his bondage to a dry, legalistic religion, and moved him into the freedom of grace - and it's a passage that is all about grace and what it means for us as God-seekers. Paul makes it clear that there is no one who can earn God's salvation, and nothing we can do to make ourselves deserving. God's love and

grace are given freely and extravagantly. All we can do is receive them and celebrate.

There is one thing that is noted here, though, that we need to consider. We are not saved by what we do, but when God saves us and calls us, God does ask us to do “good works” for the sake of God’s Reign. As verse 10 puts it: *“We are God’s masterpiece (some translations say “workmanship”)...created anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”* We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* them! There is no such thing as a Christ-follower who is not a minister (the word simply means servant), and the works God calls us to have been “prepared” for us - in the gifts and abilities God has given us, and in the situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves. As we answer God’s call, and live as servants of God’s Reign, that’s when we really discover God’s life and grace flowing through us.

How can you receive God’s grace as a free gift today? And how can you embrace and do the good work has God saved you *for*?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to recognise what God wants us to do, and to gain the strength to do it, is to give thanks - for God’s grace and salvation, for God’s calling, and for all the ways God has equipped us for service. Make thanksgiving your main practice today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, God, for making me a part of your purpose.

Tuesday 20 February 2018

Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-18a

Reflection: Tender-heartedness, humility, not retaliating when hurt or attacked, doing good even if we suffer - this is Peter’s description of a Christlike life, and it goes contrary to all of our “natural” inclinations. But, the truth is, our “natural” inclinations are not true to what human nature, as God created it to be, really is. All the things within us that war against the life of love and grace that God calls us to are not natural, but sub-natural. When we sin, we’re not being “only human,” we are being less than human. To see what is truly “natural” and what is really human, we need to look at Jesus - and,

as Peter affirms in the last part of today’s reading, Jesus was willing to suffer for the sake of love. When we fail to live as Jesus did - loving, forgiving, including, and making peace - we are choosing to live as less than the fully human, God-imaged people we were created to be. And we hinder the capacity of those whom we hurt to be fully human as well.

Notice how Peter points out that living in this Christlike way is what brings us a life of goodness and happiness. Notice, also, that Peter couples worship *of* Christ with living *like* Christ. There is no better way to honour Jesus than by imitating him in his loving, gracious and sacrificial life, and there is no better way to fullness of resurrection life, either.

Which of the Christlike actions that Peter lists here do you most need to work on today? How can you commit to being more Christlike?

Practice for Today: It is easy to speak about living like Jesus, but we all know it’s much harder to actually do it. That’s why we need the practice of confession to help us be honest about our struggles, and to remind us to invite God’s Spirit to forgive us and help us. Whenever you fail to be Christlike today, confess this to God, and ask forgive of God - and of those you may have hurt.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Jesus, make me like you.

Wednesday 21 February 2018

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Reflection: On Sunday we read Mark’s account of Jesus’ temptation, and reflected on the vision of a unified world that Mark portrays, and that formed the basis of Jesus’ mission. Today we turn to the more detailed account of the temptation in Matthew’s Gospel. What is interesting here is that none of the temptations asked Jesus to do anything that was not part of his mission. He was called to feed people with bread that was miraculously provided. He was called to reveal God’s power in amazing acts. He was given all authority in heaven and earth, and he was meant to bring all the glory and wealth of the world together under God’s Reign. The temptation was not about rejecting God’s mission. It was about

seeking to accomplish God's mission in ways that were unworthy of God.

But, Jesus managed to stay faithful to his calling by holding the Scriptures - which revealed God's purpose and values - close to his heart. Since all of the passages Jesus quoted are from the book of Deuteronomy, some scholars believe Jesus had been meditating on this book during his wilderness journey. Whether that is true or not, there can be no question that Jesus had spent enough time meditating on the Scriptures to ensure that they were burned into his heart. This is why, when the time of challenge came, he was able to draw on the Scriptures so easily and confidently. This is also why Jesus could discern the difference between God's ways of fulfilling God's mission and those that violated God's values and priorities.

How are you tempted to fulfil God's call in ways that are unworthy of God? How can you allow the Scriptures to strengthen your discernment and keep you faithful today?

Practice for Today: An important practice that always forms part of our worship is the reading of Scripture. When we listen, allow the words to sink into our hearts, and submit to their message, Scripture can transform us into true reflections of Jesus. Take time today to read and submit to God's word through the Scriptures.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Speak to me, O God, and guide me in your ways.

Thursday 22 February 2018

Reading: Romans 3:21-31

Reflection: In the book of Romans, Paul often reflects on the teaching of the Old Testament, and what it can teach us about faith. In today's reading he points out that the law is not what makes us right with God, but faith in Christ and his sacrifice. We are so used to hearing these words that they are easy to read. But, as we will see this Sunday, the idea of a dying Messiah was very hard for Peter and the other disciples to grasp - so much so that Peter reprimanded Jesus when he predicted his death.

Two things stand out as we reflect on Paul's words today. The first is that God declares us to be right with God as a gift. This applies to

all people - even those who died before Christ came! (verses 25 & 26). And, since God determines rightness with God, not we, this gift must also apply to those whom we would think of as anything but right with God. The second thing that stands out is that we experience this "rightness" with God through faith. Faith is not a different kind "work" that we must do to be saved. It is the means by which we open ourselves to experience the gift that God has already given us in Christ.

Faith is not just agreeing with an idea in your mind. Faith in the Scriptures is about orienting our entire lives, our values, ethics, aspirations, and behaviour, around what we believe. So, if we truly believe that Christ's death somehow opens a door to intimate relationship with God, our whole lives should reflect this. And, since intimacy changes us, faith in the dying Messiah should also lead us to reflect Jesus' love and self-sacrifice in our own lives.

How much is your life oriented around Jesus and his self-sacrificial grace? In what ways do you reflect this same grace in your own life?

Practice for Today: It's always tough to give ourselves for what we believe, especially when it means making sacrifices for others, but this is, inevitably, what faith in Christ calls us to. Today, seek to give of your abilities and resources in order to bring life and grace to others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Jesus, I believe in you, and I give myself to follow you.

Friday 23 February 2018

Reading: Genesis 16:1-6

Reflection: One of the things we most struggle with as followers of Christ is learning to live not just by God's purposes but also by God's methods. As we have seen this was the heart of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and we will see this dynamic at work in Jesus' life again on Sunday. In today's reading we see a similar process working itself out with Abram and Sarai. They had been promised a son by God (God's purpose), but their faith had not yet stretched to believing it could happen in a miraculous way (God's method), so they use a very human tactic to try and fulfil God's

promise for themselves - Sarai gives Abram her slave, Hagar, to sleep with. This was a common practice at the time, and Hagar would not have been consulted. But, the plan backfires, and the result is centuries of enmity between the descendants of Sarai's son and those of Hagar's son.

When we think of faith, we usually think of believing in the right *ideas*, but we seldom consider that faith is also about believing in the right *way*. It's not just *what* we believe that's important, but *how* we believe. If we are to be true followers of Christ, then we need to believe in the same way Jesus did - orienting our entire lives around God's purposes, principles, values, and ethics. It's not enough to just believe *in* Jesus. True faith calls us to live *like* Jesus. This is a theme that we need to be reminded of again and again - and we will encounter it many times in the Scriptures and in these daily reflections.

Today, reflect on *how* you believe as much as *what*. To what extent do you not just believe in Jesus, but also seek to live like him?

Practice for Today: The practice of prayer is not so much about trying to change God. It's really about God changing us - bringing us in line with God's purposes and values. Because of this, the act of intercession can be a powerful way to put our faith into action - especially when we open ourselves to becoming the answers to our own prayers!

Breath-Prayer for Today: Give me the faith not just to believe in you, Jesus, but also to seek to live like you.

Saturday 24 February 2018

Reading: Mark 8:27-30

Reflection: Today's reading sets the scene for the Gospel reading that is set for tomorrow. It's a moment of triumph that will soon change to a scene of confusion, misunderstanding, and difficult challenges. Jesus asks the disciples who the people say he is, and then he asks who they say he is. This is not because Jesus wants his ego stroked. Jesus asks this because he knows that both the people and his disciples have not yet begun to really understand who he is and what he has come to do. Peter's pronouncement that

Jesus is the Messiah is an insightful one. He has recognised that Jesus really is the Promised One that all of Israel has been waiting for. It's a significant moment when he admits this.

But, as we will see tomorrow, it's just the first step in his faith journey. He has not yet understood what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, and when he finds out, he will find it very difficult to accept. It took a long time for Peter and the others to realise that God's ways were usually very different from their expectations. It can take a long time for us to realise this, too!

What expectations do you have of God that may be mistaken? What ideas do you believe about God that don't fit with the God that Jesus revealed? How can you open your heart and mind to be surprised more easily by God?

Practice for Today: The prayer of invocation - of asking God's Spirit to come to us, fill us, and speak to us - is an important act in which we open ourselves to God's revelation of God's Self to us. Today may be a good time to pray invocation prayers throughout the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: God, rid me of any ideas about you that are unworthy of you.

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