

Sacredise Daily

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
25 February – 03 March 2018

Thought for the Week:

Last week Mark's Gospel described the beginning of Jesus' ministry, including his first temptation in the wilderness. This week, we move to the beginning of the journey to the cross, including Jesus' second great temptation. Yesterday we read about Peter's confident proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. You would think this was a moment of triumph - Peter had suddenly "seen the light". But, today, on this second Sunday in Lent, we realise that he had not yet understood what had been revealed to him.

Immediately after Peter's announcement, Jesus began to predict his death. This was too much for Peter, who thought he knew what the Messiah would be and do, and so he, rather patronisingly, tried to correct Jesus, almost like an older brother pointing out his younger sibling's foolishness. Jesus' response was strong and surprising. He called Peter "Satan" not because he was judging Peter, but because, in that moment, Peter had become a tempter who was trying to lure Jesus away from his purpose. Jesus followed this up with a conversation about losing life in order to find it.

Peter's mistake was to believe that his revelation of Jesus' Messiahship gave him the right to be certain about who Jesus was and what he had come to do. He had moved from faith to certainty, and in the process, he became a tempter and an obstacle to God's work. This week our readings will lead us deeper into the kind of faith that releases certainty and embraces the mystery and risk of following Jesus.

Sunday 25 February 2018

Reading: Mark 8:31-38

Reflection: Joseph Campbell, the scholar of mythology and culture, is famous for saying, "We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us." This is very similar to the words of Jesus in today's reading. Peter, although he

had recognised that Jesus was the Messiah, had not yet realised that Jesus was different kind of Messiah - a dying Messiah. Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting his death, because he had not yet released the "life he planned" – the life of being a lieutenant in the new order that a victorious Messiah would bring.

Jesus, however, has a different agenda. We must lose our lives - giving up our own dreams, expectations, desires and self-preservation in order to embrace the self-giving, abundant life of God's Reign. You cannot enter a new world if you're not willing to leave the old one! That's why, when we try to save our lives - our lives built on self-preservation, power, wealth, and immediate gratification - we end up losing the true life that God offers. But, if we are willing to die - to release the life we have - we are able to enter the life of God and discover abundance, vibrant life in sharing, peace-making, justice-bringing, and loving.

In what ways are you still trying to "save your life?" How can you commit to losing your life today so that you can find the life of God in more fullness?

Practice for Today: The practice of absolution is usually associated with sin. When we have confessed what we have done wrong, we are absolved - washed clean or released - by God's forgiveness. Today, however, we need to be absolved of our old lives. Today, every time you find yourself trying to "save your life," practice absolving yourself - let go of the life you have planned so that you can find the life God has for you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I let go of *my* life, O God, and open myself to receive *yours*.

Monday 26 February 2018

Reading: Genesis 21:1-7

Reflection: Abraham and Sarah had "lost" their lives - giving up the security of family and of a known country to follow God's promise into a new and uncertain future. They had made some mistakes along the way, but in today's reading they are rejoicing because the first sign of fulfilment - of experiencing the new life of promise - has come into being. Sarah, in her old age, has given birth to a son! God

has proved faithful and has led them into a new life, which they could never have known if they had not given up their old one. However, as we will see tomorrow, even this new life - this new child - must be “lost” or given up if they are to enter God’s new life fully.

It is easy to fall into the trap of just adding Jesus to our existing lives. We have comfortably viewed faith as something we do in our heads, something that assures us of heavenly bliss, and that doesn’t have to change how we live. But, if we are to take the call of Jesus seriously, we will realise that faith is actually a radical decision to give up the life we have in order to follow Christ into a life of love and peace and justice in God’s Reign. The amazing thing, that we can only discover by risking our lives on faith is that losing our lives and living in Jesus’ sacrificial way, really does lead us into a deeper, richer, and more abundant life.

Where are you beginning to see signs of God’s life breaking through in your life?

Practice for Today: One of the ways we can be sure to recognise and embrace God’s life is to take notice as it permeates our life. The best practice for this “taking notice” is thanksgiving. Whenever you see or feel God’s life working in and through you, take a moment to thank God for God’s promise and presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, God, for the life I find in you.

Tuesday 27 February 2018

Reading: Genesis 22:1-19

Reflection: Today’s reading is more than a little shocking. If we read it too literally, God appears to be cruel and fickle and more than a little confused, changing God’s mind at the last minute. It’s probably more accurate to realise that Abraham was viewing God through the lens of what he already knew about the gods of his day. Child sacrifice was a common religious practice for people of that time, and Abraham somehow became convinced that God was no different from other gods. However, God somehow broke through to him at the last minute and enabled him to understand that God did not want human sacrifice. In this moment, Abraham must have seen that he had entered into a completely new kind of life with a

completely different kind of God. He still had much to learn, but it was going to be quite a ride!

In spite of Abraham’s inadequate understanding of God, he had grasped one thing. He was going to have to give up the life he had planned to find the life God had waiting for him. In his case, he believed this meant even being willing to give up the son God had promised him. It was tremendous act of courage and faith on his part to obey this impulse - as it must have been for his teenage son to submit to his father’s intention (what old man could possibly tie up an unwilling teenager for sacrifice?). Yet, in this case, he had to give up his old ideas of God in order to learn that he was now following a radically different deity. What a joyful relief this new revelation must have been!

What old ideas about God do you hold on to that may be hurting you or others? How can you open yourself to be surprised by a new revelation of God today?

Practice for Today: Anytime we seek to know God, we will find ourselves drawn into praise. It is when we celebrate God’s nature and purpose and values, that we are opened to new revelations of the God who loves to surprise us with joy, love and grace. Today, offer words and acts of praise at every opportunity.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, that you are always leading me deeper into the mystery of yourself.

Wednesday 28 February 2018

Reading: John 12:36-43

Reflection: The way some people talk, you would think that faith is easy. The truth, though, is that even Jesus recognised that faith can be really hard - because it impacts our entire lives, not just what we think. That’s why in today’s passage (which comes just after John’s account of the cleansing of the temple) Jesus challenges his hearers to become “people whose lives are determined by the light” (CEB). For some of those who heard Jesus, though, it was almost impossible for them to do what he asked. The religious leaders were so invested in the status quo that they either couldn’t see who Jesus was or, as John points out, they had too much to lose. The quotes

from Isaiah make it sound like God was keeping these people from faith, but it would be more accurate to recognise that faith is always a choice - a tough choice, but a choice nevertheless.

To what extent do you view faith as living a life that is “determined by the light,” or defined by Jesus’ message and mission? Where do you struggle to believe and embrace this call of Jesus? Where are you afraid that the cost of completely giving yourself over to Jesus might be too high?

We all wrestle with the implications of our faith. This is why we need to make a daily choice to follow Christ and allow his light to shine through us as much as possible. And, as Frederick Buechner says, if we’re honest, we won’t always be able to say ‘yes’ to Jesus, but as long as we keep opening little by little to his light, we’re on the right track.

Practice for Today: To live a life that is “determined by the light” requires us to dedicate ourselves to Jesus’ message and mission, even - or especially - when it’s hard. Today, why not try to re-affirm your commitment to Jesus throughout the day?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Let your light shine in and through me, Jesus, even when I’m afraid, or when the cost seems too high.

Thursday 01 March 2018

Reading: Exodus 19:1-9a

Reflection: Immediately after bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses led them to Mount Sinai where God gave him a message for the newly freed slaves - they were God’s people, God had revealed God’s love and commitment to them, and now God called them to stay true to God and God’s ways in order to know God’s life and goodness. It was a gracious and loving invitation and the people initially responded very positively. However, over time, they began to doubt God’s love, they began to want their own way, and they began to turn away from God - to their own detriment.

On Sunday we’ll see how far the worship in the Temple had fallen from what God intended, and how this grieved and angered Jesus - yet, in spite of this the promise of God, made all those years before, remained in place, and Jesus sought to bring people back into

loving relationship with their God. All they had to do was make a choice to turn back to God and renew their commitment.

We all have times when our relationship with God gets strained. We all doubt God’s commitment and we all have moments when our pride and self-centredness move us out of God’s will for us. Yet, God’s promise to the people of Israel is still in place, and it applies to us. All we have to do is admit our shortcomings and renew our commitment. Where do you need to come clean with God today?

Practice for Today: Self-examination, especially when it involves admitting our mistakes, is not a very popular practice even in the Church. However, it is the first step to repentance, to the change that brings healing and restores us to joyous relationship with God. Why not spend some time examining your heart and opening to God’s healing love today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Remove anything in me that would draw me away from you, O God.

Friday 02 March 2018

Reading: Acts 7:30-40

Reflection: Today’s passage comes from the long and impassioned speech of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, as he confronted the religious leaders who would soon execute him. He was accused of preaching that Jesus had changed the customs and laws of Judaism, but Stephen goes back to the very beginning and traces the history of God’s people, revealing how Jesus had fulfilled God’s purpose. It was not Jesus who had moved away from God’s commands, but the people who, since Moses’ time, had constantly turned away from God to idols. Of course, the religious folk did not like hearing this from Stephen and so they stoned him.

We may be quick to associate with Stephen and point fingers at the religious leaders, but if we’re honest, we have to admit that we are just as prone to fall into idolatry. We also move away from the call of God to worship, justice, compassion and grace, and find ourselves following our own agendas of religion, self-interest, indifference and judgment. It is this same idolatry that Jesus confronts when he cleanses the Temple - which we read about this Sunday.

The greatest problem, though, is not our idolatry. It's our denial of our idolatry. If we will just acknowledge it when we drift away from God, we can turn back and find healing. But, when we insist on pretending we are without sin, we end up harming others and ourselves. What idolatries do you need to acknowledge today?

Practice for Today: The only way to be freed from our idolatry is through the life-giving practice of confession. Try to make time today to confess whenever you find your heart drifting away from devotion to Christ.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Free me from my idols, O God, and capture my heart with your love again.

Saturday 03 March 2018

Reading: Psalm 19

Reflection: This Psalm is an old favourite. It celebrates two ways that God communicates with human beings - through the natural world, and through God's law found in the Scriptures. Both of these "voices of God" are praised for their beauty and glory, and for the life they offer. The Psalmist knows what we also know in our hearts to be true - even in our best-intentioned moments, we need resources beyond ourselves to stay faithful to God's gracious purposes. God's word, spoken through Scripture and through the natural world - what the Celts called the "second Bible" - is given to remind us of God's presence and call, and to guide us in following Christ into the ways of life.

The Old Testament reading for tomorrow gives the account of God giving the Ten Commandments to God's people. The first four commandments are about loving God. The last six are about loving others. When Jesus overturned the tables in the Temple (the Gospel reading for tomorrow) he was confronting the way God's people had stopped living out of these two loves. The law, and the reflection of God in the natural world, are both designed to teach us to be lovers of God and lovers of the world.

How can you open yourself to God's voice and learn a little more to be a true lover of God and of the world today?

Practice for Today: It should come as no surprise that today's

practice is listening. If we seek to hear God's voice, and follow God's call, there is no other way than to slow down, still ourselves and listen for the whisper of God's Spirit in the Scriptures and in our world. Do this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Speak to me, O God, and open my ears and heart to hear your voice.

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