

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
17 - 23 July 2016

Thought for the Week:

There is no shortage of voices to listen to in our society. Daily we are bombarded with thousands of messages promising us all sorts of blessings and benefits. In all of this noise it can be tough to hear God's voice. That's why it is so important that we learn to listen, intentionally and attentively. This Sunday your worship may focus on the Gospel reading (which describes how Mary sat listening at Jesus' feet) or it may be based on Amos' vision of a time of judgement on Israel's injustice when there would be a famine of hearing God's word. The contrast between these two readings is significant. On the one hand Mary, a woman who was usually excluded from learning or discussing the *Torah* - the law - breaks convention to listen to Christ's words, and on the other hand, the people become deaf to God's word because they refuse to listen. This is the key message this week - listening takes work, and if we refuse to listen, we will inevitably become unable to hear what God is saying.

The practice of listening for God's voice is not some mystical, magical experience in which we hear loud, booming voices. Rather, God's voice is usually heard in our own hearts, and in the words of others. That's why it's equally important that we learn to listen well to others, and to the voice in our own hearts.

This week, we will explore what it means to listen for God's voice.

Sunday 17 July 2016

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

Reflection: It is common to view Mary's act of sitting at Jesus' feet, and Jesus' response to Martha's complaint, as an indication that meditation and contemplation are more important than action. But, to take this view is to misunderstand the point. Up to now this whole chapter of Luke's Gospel has been about hospitality. Martha was certainly performing the necessary required tasks in order to extend

hospitality to Jesus and his followers. But, the hospitality that Jesus was concerned with was not that of human culture, so much as that of God's Reign. Jesus was inviting people into God's hospitality. By sitting at his feet Mary, who, as a woman would usually have been forced to remain apart from the men as they listened to Jesus, had taken her place as a disciple in the Reign of God. She had claimed for herself - no doubt confident in Jesus' invitation - a place of equality with the men, and a place of belonging in the hospitality of God. This is why Jesus commended her.

From the rest of the chapter that has come before this account we know that such listening to Jesus would always lead to action - to extending the invitation to others. So, it's not that listening is better than action. It's that we cannot act in accordance with the mission of Jesus until we have found our place in God's Reign and listened carefully to God's voice in order to know how to act rightly. There is no "going off half cocked" in Jesus' way. Rather, our action needs to flow from a life of listening carefully to God's wise guidance. But action must always follow, or we're not listening properly.

How can you sit at Jesus' feet today, and then act on the basis of what you've heard?

Practice for Today: There are many ways to listen to God's voice. Silence is one very helpful way. This does not necessarily mean that we turn off all sounds (for example, some people may find that music is helpful in their meditation). Rather, silence means stillness - taking the time to quiet the noise of voices within us and around us in order to focus on God's whisper. Stillness is also about being willing to wait on God's guidance and not act hurriedly or unpreparedly. Take some time for silence and stillness today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I sit at your feet, Jesus, help me to hear your voice.

Monday 18 July 2016

Reading: Colossians 1:27-2:7

Reflection: No matter what we may feel about the apostle Paul, we can never say that he was lazy! He worked relentlessly and tirelessly to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to help the Jewish

Christians to accept their Gentile sisters and brothers. But, Paul knew that his message, and the power by which he proclaimed it, were both given to him by God. It was the presence of Jesus within him that filled him with wisdom and strength - and he joyfully declared that this same presence was available to all believers. This meant that the same power and wisdom that he enjoyed was within every follower of Christ.

The heart of his conviction that this was so was that "in Christ lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". This is why the apostle encouraged his readers to let their roots grow deep into Jesus, and to build their lives on him. Once we have recognised that Jesus lives within us, we discover that we are able to draw on the wisdom and inspiration of Christ in our daily lives. We find that listening for God's voice is not only about reading the Scriptures, or hearing what others have to say, but about connecting with the voice of Christ within our own hearts. And, once we've learned to do this, we will know how amazing and generous God's gift of God's self has been to us!

How can you connect with the presence of Christ in your own heart and life today?

Practice for Today: Our praise is often focussed on a God "out there," above all creation. This can lead us to miss the truth that God is within us as well. Today, try to be constantly aware of Christ's presence in your own heart, and respond in praise. Then, allow that sense of God's presence to guide you through the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you Jesus, for you are present in all creation, and within me.

Tuesday 19 July 2016

Reading: Proverbs 9:1-18

Reflection: The Book of Proverbs depicts both Wisdom and Folly as women. Wisdom is gracious, welcoming and faithful, where Folly is adulterous and careless. It's not unusual for the Bible to use sexual language to explain spiritual things - in fact, in the Old Testament the words "idolatry" and "adultery" are used almost synonymously. This is because both our sexuality and our

spirituality are central to our lives as human beings. In today's reading, both Wisdom and Folly use similar invitations to call to women and men. Notice how both women are described as overlooking the city, and both speak to the "simple" and those "who lack good judgement". The message here is that every person has the choice to either be wise or foolish. The difference lies in what kind of "feast" we choose to enjoy - one of goodness, grace and openness to correction, or one of secrets and selfish enjoyment.

The section in the middle of this passage describes the difference between trying to correct a mocker and trying to correct a wise person. When we refuse to listen to the loving and wise corrections of others we only hurt ourselves. But, if we listen and are open to the changes that such corrections can bring, we find life. Notice, though, that the final difference between those who receive correction and those who don't is whether they "fear" God or not. When we live in reverence for God, constantly opening our lives to become the people whom God created us to be, we grow wise and humble. Here is where wisdom starts - in submitting our lives to the transforming challenge of the Gospel.

Whose correction do you need to listen to today?

Practice for Today: The primary characteristic that frees us to hear and receive the correction of others is humility. It is only when we are too arrogant or self-protective that we refuse to hear the tough words that can lead us to our best lives. But, humility does not come naturally. In order to grow more humble, we need to be honest about ourselves - our good and our bad characteristics - and open ourselves to God's healing and transformation. Today reflect honestly on your life and confess anything that needs to change.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me the humility to listen to the loving correction of others, O God.

Wednesday 20 July 2016

Reading: John 6:41-51

Reflection: Chapter 6 of John's Gospel can be hard to read and Jesus' teachings in this chapter were hard for the first listeners to hear. Jesus did not always make his meaning clear. He would say

things that sounded outrageous to people in order to communicate a deeper truth. When Jesus began to speak about eating his flesh, the people were shocked at what sounded like suicidal cannibalism. They seemed unable to get beyond the words to the meaning Jesus was trying to communicate. The context Jesus used for these words was God's gift of manna to the people in the wilderness in the time of Moses. As manna sustained them, so Jesus offered himself as our nourishment. He is the "Bread from Heaven" - the Word of God which nourishes and sustains our entire beings. When we come to him, and, by listening to him, take his life into ourselves, we enter into a whole new way of being, a whole new quality of life. This is the heart of Jesus' message here - and we remember it and receive it every time we share in Holy Communion.

Notice how much emphasis Jesus puts on listening to God and to himself. It is when we listen to God's voice that we are drawn to Jesus and find life in him. God's invitation is always being proclaimed throughout the world to anyone who will listen - through creation, through other people, through the Scriptures, through our own inner voice. All we need to do is listen and respond and we will find ourselves entering into the life that Jesus offered.

How can you tune yourself to God's voice speaking through your world today?

Practice for Today: One of the most transformative gifts of the Bible is that it teaches us to hear God's voice. Jesus taught that the Scriptures were not an end in themselves, but were a signpost that pointed to Christ. When we spend time listening for God's voice through the Bible, we learn how to recognise God's voice in every time and place. Today take some time and allow the Bible to teach you to recognise God's word a little more.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I read your word, O God, teach me to recognise your voice in every moment of my life.

Thursday 21 July 2016

Reading: Acts 1:15-20

Reflection: Peter was a man of action. At the Ascension Jesus instructed the disciples to wait until they had received the outpouring

of God's Spirit, but it seems that Peter was not very good at waiting. Jesus had appointed twelve apostles, so Peter felt it was important that they replaced Judas. He also had all the necessary proof texts to support his idea that they appoint another apostle. However, if you read a bit further, you will see that the apostles selected two men and then asked God to show them which of the two God had chosen. Since neither of the two are ever mentioned again in the New Testament, we can assume that God had actually chosen neither of them. In fact, it seems that the one God had chosen was not even a follower of Jesus yet. But, when the time came, God appointed Paul to replace Judas.

One of the most difficult qualities we need to develop as followers of Jesus is that of perseverance. This theme will be the focus of Sunday's readings, but here we see how impatience (which wars against perseverance) can mislead us. Peter's impatience probably did no harm, but it didn't do any good either. Instead of waiting and listening for God's guidance and timing, Peter took things into his own hands, and rushed into an unnecessary decision. Sometimes the most important thing we can do in order to persevere is to wait.

Where in your life do you need to wait and listen a little more?

Practice for Today: When we get frustrated by waiting and we long to see something happening, it can be tempting to do anything to make things move a bit. But, it can often be wise to wait and listen for God's voice, and then go forward once we've received God's direction. Journaling is one of the best practices for processing our frustrations, for working through the things that challenge our perseverance, and for listening to God's voice. Today make time to journal what's happening in your life and how you feel about it.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Give me the perseverance and patience to wait on your guidance, O God.

Friday 22 July 2016

Reading: Psalm 138

Reflection: There is a lovely and helpful contrast in today's Psalm. In the midst of his thanksgiving, the Psalmist celebrates God's faithful love, rejoicing in the way God answers prayers as soon as

they are spoken. There is a wonderful sense of security in God's care for God's humble people, and in God's protection and rescue from the attacks of enemies. Yet, it seems almost contradictory that there should be any need for a refuge if God is answering the Psalmist's prayer. There is a confidence here in God's answers to prayer, but there is also a recognition that these answers aren't always what we might expect or hope for. Sometimes God's answers are not for us to be removed from hardship, but to persevere through the hardship, trusting in God's presence and care, and drawing on God's strength and courage.

Sometimes prayer is made out to be a simple solution to every problem. But, this is not the case. No prayer goes unanswered, but not all answers are what we would hope for. Rather, as we pray, we discover the strength to persevere in the way of Jesus no matter what our circumstances may be. And as we persist in prayer, we may sometimes find that, in time, things do work out as we desire. But, far more often we will find that our desires change over time, as our prayers align us more closely with God's desires, and the answers we receive are far better for us than the answers we originally wanted.

How can you persevere in prayer today, trusting in God's answers?

Practice for Today: The glory of prayer is that we are free to pray anything we want. There is nothing wrong with expressing both our deepest and our most frivolous desires to God, as long as we remain open for God's answers to be different from our expectations. The important thing is to open ourselves to God's transforming presence, and allow our lives to be aligned with the values of God's Reign. Make time for some honest prayer today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Hear my prayer, O God, and teach me to be open to your answer.

Saturday 23 July 2016

Reading: Esther 4:1-17

Reflection: The story of Esther is violent and shocking. It tells of one of the worst cases of anti-Semitism in history. An official in the Persian king's court, Haman, had a great loathing for God's people

and came up with a plan to exterminate them. He convinced the king to support his plan and give his authority and money to ensure that the Jews were wiped out. On a certain day, Haman decreed, all the people of Persia were commanded to kill their Jewish neighbours and then take their property for themselves. Fortunately, there was time before the day came for the Jewish people to find a way to avert this crisis. The key to their plan was the young woman, Esther, who had been chosen to be part of the king's harem. But, for Esther to plead with the king would be taking her life into her hands, and so she was afraid. Her uncle, Mordecai, encouraged her, though, helping her to understand that if the attack went ahead, she would not be spared.

Two things stand out in Mordecai's speech to Esther. Firstly, he was convinced that God would save God's people. If Esther didn't step up, Mordecai believed that salvation would come some other way. Secondly, he helped Esther to understand that her appointment to the king's court had significance. She would need to be strong and courageous, and she would need to be persistent with the king, but Mordecai believed God would empower her. So, Esther answered the call, and her people were saved.

What difficult tasks may God be calling you to do? How can you nurture your courage and persistence for these tasks?

Practice for Today: When God calls us to participate in God's saving mission - as God does with all of us - we only have to start where we are, with whatever resources we have. This means that, like Esther, we need to recognise what we have been given, so that we can draw strength from the ways God has already provided for us and prepared us. This is where thanksgiving is such a powerful practice. It reminds of all that God has given us, and it strengthens our faith and courage for whatever may lie ahead.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that as you call me you equip me.

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