

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
23 – 29 October 2016

Thought for the Week:

It is an unfortunate reality of our world that those who call themselves Christians are often accused of being arrogant, judgemental and "holier-than-thou". Yet, we have all experienced the impact of those who are truly humble. When we encounter someone who is deeply aware of their own brokenness, we are immediately struck by their humility, their compassion, their acceptance, and their wisdom. Isn't it amazing how these qualities are viewed so positively across our world, and yet so many of us are still driven by the cult of wealth and celebrity? Even in the Church, it is easy to fall into the trap of perfectionism, attention seeking, and human standards of success.

Jesus repeatedly taught his followers how important it is to nurture humility, gentleness, simplicity and an awareness of where we still need to change. He constantly challenged those who believed they were righteous while welcoming those who knew they were not. And he was never too proud to associate with the "least" in his society.

This week we will seek to nurture the Christ-like attitude of humility within our hearts.

Sunday 23 October 2016

Reading: Luke 18:9-14

Reflection: Where does your confidence lie? Is it in your own perfection or goodness? Is it in your ability to abide by the rules of your religion? Is it in the knowledge that you don't do some of the bad things that others do? The beginning of today's reading states that Jesus told this parable to confront people who found confidence in their own righteousness - and who, as a result, tended to look down on others. One of the big challenges for those who have followed Jesus for any length of time is that we can begin to feel like we've got everything sorted out. We may begin to think that we have reached some kind of perfection and that we are better than those

who do not share our faith. We may even have moments where we believe that God is lucky to have us on "God's team". If we have ever felt any of these things, however subtly, we are like the Pharisee in Jesus' story. But, it is the repentant tax collector, so aware of his shortcomings and his need of God's transforming power, that finds himself connected to God's presence and grace.

The truth is that we all have both the Pharisee and the tax collector within us. We all have areas in our lives where we feel confident in our own achievements, abilities or qualities, and we all have areas where we are very aware of our shortcomings. The challenge of Jesus' parable is for us to give thanks for our strengths - recognising them as the fruit of God's work within us - and to be willing to do the work of repentance where needed, opening ourselves up for God's Spirit to change us even more.

For what parts of your life do you need to give thanks today? And what repentance do you need to do?

Practice for Today: In Ignatian spirituality an important practice is what is known as the "prayer of examen". This prayer is often used twice a day to prepare for what lies ahead in the morning, and then to reflect on the events of the day in the evening. The point is to recognise what is happening in our own hearts and lives, to identify where Christ's character has been revealed in us and where we have failed to follow the Jesus way. Then, in response, we give thanks and invite God's Spirit to work in us a little more. Why not practice the "prayer of examen" for yourself today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me, O God, where your light shines through me and where I have allowed my darkness to smother it.

Monday 24 October 2016

Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Reflection: The idea of being persecuted for following Jesus has often been misunderstood. As Peter points out in today's reading, when we follow the ways of Jesus we will inevitably find ourselves in conflict with the values and norms of the society around us, and this will often result in persecution and suffering for us. However, if the

reason that people oppose or mock us is because we have been arrogant, judgmental or exclusionary, then we are not really being persecuted for our faith. We're just reaping the consequences of our bad attitudes (verse 15). Too often, when Christians claim persecution, it is because of bad attitudes, not good faith.

It may seem strange, though, that we are called to rejoice in legitimate suffering. As Peter explains, everyone is ultimately judged – not in the sense of condemnation, but in the sense of being examined or assessed – in order to see what is really going on in our hearts. And, when we are persecuted because of our commitment to Jesus' way of justice, mercy, grace, and love, it reveals that our hearts are no longer captured by the values of this world, but are truly committed to God's Reign. When we suffer like this there is reason to rejoice because we know that we are living in the most life giving way, and this gives us the strength to continue.

What suffering are you experiencing because of your commitment to Jesus' way?

Practice for Today: The Scriptures make it very clear that thanksgiving is a mark of a follower of Jesus. No matter what we may be going through, thanksgiving reminds us of God's presence, strengthens us to stay true to Jesus' way, and reveals God's grace to others. Today, give thanks through every situation and experience.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I thank you, O God, for the life you give me in Christ and for sustaining me through every circumstance.

Tuesday 25 October 2016

Reading: Daniel 5:1-12

Reflection: There is a simple message in today's strange story. If you want to get the full picture you may want to read through to the end of the chapter. King Belshazzar had taken the throne after Nebuchadnezzar. Although he had not been responsible for the conquest of Jerusalem, he nevertheless decided to use the cups of gold and silver that had been taken from the Temple. These were sacred objects, and he knew that, but he decided to show off his power by using them in a profane way. And that's when he saw the

writing on the wall. Among the king's wise counsellors only Daniel, the Jew, was found capable of interpreting the words. Two things stand out in Daniel's interaction with the king. Firstly, although the king promised him riches and power, Daniel had the humility to decline (although the king ignored this and gave them to him anyway). Secondly, the message, which Daniel interpreted for the king, was a judgement on the king's arrogance and a prediction that he would lose the kingdom – which is what happened.

Whenever we receive any measure of influence or abundance, it is tempting to show it off for others and to use it for our own aggrandisement. But, to do this is to embrace the way of arrogance and self-centredness. Although we may not mean to, whenever we puff ourselves up we inevitably humiliate those around us who are made to feel less by our boasting. This is neither loving nor life giving – which is why God opposes the proud, as the Scriptures say. Rather, our example should be that of Daniel – filled with God's spirit, but deeply humble and gracious.

Where are you tempted to arrogance today? How can you humble yourself a little more?

Practice for Today: Our biggest problem is not our pride. Our biggest problem is when we fail to acknowledge and repent of our pride. We all struggle with the temptation to puff ourselves up, but when we confess this and allow God's Spirit to humble us, we are freed from the destructive consequences. Today, whenever you become aware of feeling better than anyone else, or if you are tempted to boast, confess it and choose a different course of action.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Deliver me from my arrogance, O God, and keep me ever humble.

Wednesday 26 October 2016

Reading: Matthew 21:28-32

Reflection: The message of Jesus in today's reading is common in the Gospels. Jesus often drew attention to the way those who were marginalised by the religious and social systems of his day were responding to the call of God's Reign. Since they were rejected by these human systems, and so had no investment in them, they had

nothing to lose by embracing the alternative way of Jesus. On the other hand, the religious leaders, who were deeply invested in the status quo, found it almost impossible to respond to Jesus because the cost was too high. To follow Christ would have meant giving up their positions of power and status and joining the outcasts, essentially becoming outcasts themselves. For most of them, this was more than their pride could handle, and so they dug their heels in and stood against Jesus and his mission.

The religious leaders were like the son in the parable who said he would do his father's bidding, but then didn't. The outcasts, on the other hand, were those who, under the old system, were unable to say yes to their father's bidding, but when Jesus opened the way, found that they were now able to respond. Once again Jesus shows how arrogance and self-righteousness keeps those who think they are in out, while humility and brokenness allows those who feel outcast in. It's a glorious turn around!

The question this raises for us is whether we are more like the religious leaders or like the outcasts. How we answer this question defines not just how we relate to God, but also how we connect with others, and how we impact the world. What is your answer today? How do you feel about it?

Practice for Today: One of the most profound effects of the practice of praise is that it reveals not just who God is, but who we are in the light of God's holiness and glory. When this happens, we are able to become aware of where our lives still need work to conform to God's image. Today, allow praise to lead you into a deeper connection with God, but also into a deeper awareness of where you still need to say "yes" to God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your grace and glory, but also for how you accept and transform me

Thursday 27 October 2016

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Reflection: To a large degree, it seems, two strong values drive much of the world today. The first is the need to avoid suffering. We spend large amounts of money and energy trying to prevent

sickness, extend our lives and protect ourselves from harm. The second is the need to feel that we are masters of our own destiny – that we are in ultimate control of our lives. The idea that our lives are shaped primarily by our own choices and actions is prevalent in almost every sector of our world, from religion to politics to economics.

In the light of these two values, Paul's words may seem out of place or even a little ridiculous. Paul speaks about expecting, accepting, and even embracing suffering. This is not to say that it is always wrong to seek to avoid suffering. Some suffering is unnecessary and is the result of bad choices by us or those around us. We should certainly seek to avoid this suffering. But, some suffering is necessary – the sacrifice of comfort in favour of doing the right thing or the pain of being persecuted or rejected for staying true to our convictions as Christ-followers, for example. This is the suffering we must accept and embrace. But, Paul also speaks about relying not on ourselves, but on God. This doesn't mean that we do nothing, but it does mean that we recognise that we are not ultimately in control and we open ourselves to the unpredictable move of God's Spirit, both in ordering our lives and sustaining us through our trials, but also in bringing us the comfort we need.

How can you place your trust in God today, even if it brings some measure of suffering into your life?

Practice for Today: One of the best faith-building practices is thanksgiving. When we give thanks we remember what God has already done for us and this builds our faith for whatever lies ahead. Today allow your gratitude to strengthen your faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that you have sustained me in the past and will continue to do so.

Friday 28 October 2016

Reading: 2 Peter 1:1-11

Reflection: If we were ever tempted to believe that the important thing in following Jesus is what we think, or whether we agree with certain ideas, the first letter of Peter reveals a very different perspective. The book begins with a celebration of God's grace and

justice in Jesus, and then goes on to describe the way followers of Jesus are to live. The list offered here consists of qualities that affect what we do - moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, affection and love. When we meet someone who displays this kind of life we always know it, and we are attracted to their grace and gentleness, their Christ-likeness and humility. Then the writer goes on to suggest that these marks prove that we are among those who are called and chosen by God.

The truth is that these qualities will not bring you fame and fortune. They will not help you to climb the corporate ladder or achieve a position of power. But, they do help us to connect deeply with God, and to build strong and creative relationships. They also help us to bring God's life to others. On Sunday the Gospel reading is the story of Zacchaeus, which shows what can happen when someone shifts from the values of human systems to these godly ways of living. We all have a touch of Zacchaeus in us, and we all need God's Spirit to nurture these alternative qualities within us.

How can you nurture the qualities of Christ-like humility in your heart today?

Practice for Today: If we desire to be more like Jesus, we need to study the life and values of Jesus. That's why we are so privileged to have the Gospels available to us. Today, make a bit of extra time to read as much of one of the Gospels as you can, and allow the life of Jesus to inspire and transform you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me, Jesus, to live with the values and qualities that marked your life.

Saturday 29 October 2016

Reading: John 8:39-47

Reflection: It may seem strange for Jesus to get into a debate about ancestry with a group of new believers (see verse 31), but there was an important reason for this. Jesus had been teaching about truth and how it frees us, but the people responded that they were descendants of Abraham and had never been enslaved to anyone. That's when Jesus challenged them by telling them that they were enslaved to sin and were the children, not of Abraham,

but of the devil - the father of lies. The result was that these same people who had believed in Jesus ended up wanting to stone him. This was not the most effective evangelism strategy!

You may be wondering what point Jesus was making here and why he didn't just accept these new believers gladly and openly. There were two things Jesus needed them to know if they were to become true disciples. The first was that they did not become children of God through their human ancestry. As Richard Rohr says, there are no grandchildren in the Reign of God. We all have to make the choice to live as citizens of God's Reign for ourselves. The second thing the people needed to understand was that it was not religious observance or human ancestry that would liberate them, but truth. This is not referring to a set of ideas, but to the person of Jesus and to his way of living – true as in the sense that an arrow flies true, along a path that reaches its target. Jesus' way is the truth that liberates us and brings us into God's family. All we need to do is believe it, embrace it and live it out each day.

How can you allow the truth to set you free today?

Practice for Today: One thing that Jesus makes very clear in his teaching is that we do not find liberation or truth through religious observance or in our own strength. We need the empowerment of the Spirit of Christ to guide us and help us. As you seek to live a true life today, constantly invoke the guidance and strength of God's Spirit to help you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come Holy Spirit and lead me into Jesus' life of truth and liberation.

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