

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
30 October – 05 November 2016

Thought for the Week:

It should not surprise us that the Scriptures return often to the themes of repentance and forgiveness. One reason for this constant repetition is that these foundational ideas are harder to understand and practice than we may at first consider. For many of us, repentance has come to be viewed as a personal apology to God for things we have done wrong, and forgiveness is what God gives us in return. However the Biblical picture is far richer and more challenging than this. In the Bible, God's forgiveness is given before we even know that we need it – that's the miracle of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and it is demonstrated in the Zacchaeus story which is the Gospel reading for this week.

But, when forgiveness touches our hearts, it automatically leads us into two responses. The first is that we respond in repentance – which simply means to change. We stop doing the destructive things that rob us and others of life, and we embrace a new, life-giving way of behaving, thinking and speaking. The second response is that we begin to extend God's forgiveness to others, recognising that as we accept them in Jesus' name, so God's Spirit can work healing and transformation in them through us.

This week, we will meditate again on the profound gifts of forgiveness and repentance.

Sunday 30 October 2016

Reading: Isaiah 1:10-18

Reflection: There's a reason that the names of Sodom and Gomorrah are in quotation marks in the New Living Translation. It is not to these cities that God is speaking, but to God's people who have become no better than these towns in their injustice, idolatry and lack of hospitality. While they continue to perform the rituals of their faith, they have ignored the spirit of it - treating the poor with no dignity or respect and exploiting labourers, taking advantage of

widows and orphans, and neglecting the generosity and hospitality that were supposed to be at the heart of their religion. Isaiah's words are a warning to the people that if they do not change, the consequences of their actions would destroy the nation.

But, Isaiah also offers an invitation. Though the sin of the people is visible and staining like scarlet, God promises to make the people as white and clean as new-fallen snow. It's an invitation to return to following God's ways and embracing God's values. In the Gospel for this Sunday, Zacchaeus demonstrates how accepting and transforming this grace of God can be - and this is what God offers God's people through Isaiah. It is also what God offers to us. Though we may already be followers of Jesus, we all have parts of our lives that need to be "saved" - places where we fail to treat others with justice and dignity. That's why repentance is a lifelong practice that is constantly needed to shift us to ever-greater levels of wholeness and Christ-likeness.

Where do you need God to wash your sin white as snow?

Practice for Today: When we are faced with the truth about ourselves – the bad attitudes, unkind words and harsh actions – we can only find healing and liberation by acknowledging these things and consciously choosing to turn away from them. Today, whenever you recognise that your "dark side" is showing, take a moment to receive God's forgiveness and repent.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you forgive me, O God, you give me the power to turn away from my darkness.

Monday 31 October 2016

Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Reflection: Today's reading sounds like a contradiction of the gracious story of Zacchaeus, and of the constant call to grace and acceptance that the Scriptures proclaim. However, we must be careful not to make these words say something they do not mean. The apostle is not giving permission for Christians to judge and exclude one another. Rather, he is calling them to live by a higher standard of justice and love than that of the society around them. The specific context for these words is an incident of incest in the

church about which the believers seem completely unconcerned. Rather than seeking to bring healing and restoration in what was clearly a broken family, the church seemed to feel rather proud of the situation – which meant that things had become completely confused. So, these words were written to challenge the believers to address this situation and make things right.

Verse 11 speaks of refusing to associate with those who are greedy, idolatrous, lacking in integrity and abusive. These are all practices that bring harm to others, and we need to be careful not to be seen to condone such unjust, destructive behaviour. But, we must also remember that Jesus went to Zacchaeus' home and this is what changed him. So, before we shun other people, we need to show grace to them. Where there is no sign of openness to Christ's transforming work, we may need to make a stand in order to protect those who can be hurt by these destructive people, but the challenge is to love them even as we oppose them! Most of us could identify with one or more of the sins Paul lists here, but hopefully we are seeking to grow and change. That's why it's usually better that we show each other grace, rather than judgement.

How can you stand against destructive behaviour in your own life and in the world around you today?

Practice for Today: Sometimes it is our actions that need to speak more than our words. When it comes to confronting injustice and destructive behaviour the best way we can do this is by dissociating ourselves from it. When we remove ourselves from people and situations that oppose the values of God's love and grace, we proclaim that we are committed to a different way. Today, whenever you find yourself confronted by destructive behaviour, simply walk away.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Give me the courage, O God, to stand against anything that brings harm or bondage to anyone.

Tuesday 01 November 2016

Reading: Zechariah 7:1-14

Reflection: After years in exile, you would think that the people of God would have learned their lesson. You would think that they

would know that God was less interested in their fasting and mourning over the destroyed Temple building than in the way they lived together as a community. Yet, when they returned to their homeland and began to rebuild their shattered nation, they continued to make the same mistakes that had led to the exile in the first place. They became more concerned about religious observance than about treating one another with grace and justice.

Millions of people gather each week in churches to declare their love for God. Yet, during the week, we continue to live in ways that increase the gap between rich and poor, that damage our planet and its creatures, and that damage our bodies through addiction to excess. Somehow, we continue to think that God wants our religious observance more than God wants us to live lives of service, sacrifice and simplicity. The Gospel challenges us for living like this, not because God wants to deny us grace and judge us, but because God knows that we're hurting ourselves and God wants to heal us and lead us to life. As we recognise the ways that our lives still do not reflect God's Reign, we are called to change - not to earn God's forgiveness, but to find healing and liberation for ourselves and those with whom we live and work.

To what extent does your life reflect what you sing and pray on Sundays?

Practice for Today: It is easy to engage in praise when it's just an academic exercise in which we acknowledge God's greatness. But, true praise reveals not just who God is, but who God calls us to be in order that we can find the life that comes from living God's way. Today, allow the practice of praise to challenge you to "live up to" the life of God's Reign.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your glory and grace and for loving me enough to challenge me to reflect them in my life.

Wednesday 02 November 2016

Reading: Habakkuk 3:17-19

Reflection: The prophet Habakkuk, engaged in debate with God over the inevitable invasion of his country, which he saw as God's

judgement. He knew that the nation would not survive what was coming, but instead of losing hope, he ended his book with a statement of faith. In the midst of his grief for his people, and the disastrous consequences of their sin, he committed to adoration and worship. No matter what circumstances he was facing, Habakkuk knew that God was the source of his life, and that God was always worthy of his devotion. He also knew that it was only in God that he and his people had any hope of survival. Even though every possession and means of survival could be wiped out - no crops, no cattle, no fruit - he insisted on finding joy (not just refuge or survival) in God. God was the strength that would enable him to "tread upon the heights" like a deer - to rise above whatever mountains of difficulty he might face.

Life has no guarantees. We will not always have things our way, and we will all face moments of grief, suffering and uncertainty. These are the times when our faith is truly tested - especially if our struggles are the result of our own poor choices. Yet, no matter what we may experience, or why it may have come about, God remains available to us as a source of strength and wisdom. When we can remember this, and draw on God's presence and power to carry us through, we can rejoice in the midst of our grief, and we will discover that we are able to overcome our tough times and thrive again.

How can you affirm your faith and commit to worship again today?

Practice for Today: The book of Habakkuk is really like a long lament - crying out to God when it seemed like God was failing God's people. Yet, as with all laments, it ends with an affirmation of God's goodness and a statement of faith and praise. Today, whether you are grieving for yourself, for someone else, or for the world, cry out to God in lament. End your prayer with an affirmation of faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Even when all seems lost, O God, I trust and worship you.

Thursday 03 November 2016

Reading: Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21

Reflection: Today we move from our reflection on repentance and forgiveness to begin to explore Sunday's theme of God's life and

rescue, and today's Psalm offers us a celebratory word. The Psalmist begins by affirming God as monarch and praising God's greatness and glory. Then he calls on the generations to proclaim God's praise to one another, while making a personal commitment to meditate on all that God is and does. There can be no question that this writer understood how important it is to focus our gaze not on our own failings, or on our circumstances, but on God - because that's what restores us, strengthens us and fills us with hope. The final verses of this Psalm shift attention to God's gracious work on behalf of God's people. God rescues God's people, and protects them. God is close to those who call on God, and acts with kindness and righteousness toward us. While life may be unpredictable, and suffering may come, God remains trustworthy, and God's love and care continue to be available to sustain us.

As those who are called by Christ's name, we believe in life. Death, evil, and sin do not have the last word, but are ultimately absorbed and transformed into the life of resurrection and of eternity. If we truly believe this, then we can have confidence that God's grace will always be sufficient to overcome our weakness and failings. We can also rest assured in the knowledge that we have access to unquenchable life now, and that our life will continue into eternity.

How can you affirm and remember God's resurrection life today?

Practice for Today: The practice of remembering is an important one in the Bible. Even Jesus knew how powerful memory could be - that's why he gave us the sacred meal by which to remember him. Begin today by remembering times when God's life and presence have sustained you. Then, go through the day holding these memories in your heart and drawing strength from them.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I remember your goodness and life I am strengthened, O God.

Friday 04 November 2016

Reading: Zechariah 6:9-15

Reflection: Zechariah proclaimed to the returning exiles a message for their own time, but also a vision of a glorious future ruled over by God's chosen priest-king. Even as he proclaimed that the high

priest, Jeshua (which is the Hebrew for 'Jesus') would complete the building of the Temple, and would rule over God's people, he also sought to show the people what God's future Reign would look like. Notice a few significant features of this vision. Firstly, Jeshua is portrayed as both priest and king, depicting a new world in which political and spiritual leadership would be one – filled with devotion, integrity and compassion. Secondly, although Jeshua would complete the Temple, people from distant lands would come to build it as well. This resonates with other prophets who proclaimed that, in God's glorious future, all people would come to worship. Finally, Jeshua is called "the Branch" which, in other prophetic writings, is a reference to God's Messiah who creates a new nation which branches off from the old, unfaithful people of Israel. For Christians Jesus is seen as the fulfilment of all that Jeshua symbolised.

The exiles were devastated when, after years of longing for their homeland, they found the country and their Temple in ruins. Yet, into this very difficult reality, Zechariah offers the people a vision of God's eternal life and purposes. This was in order to help them to understand that even their difficulties were a small part of God's much larger eternal purpose at work. This is one of the amazing gifts we share as participants in the resurrection life of Jesus.

How can you allow eternity to inspire your small tasks today?

Practice for Today: It is a powerful thing to live with an awareness of eternity. As we remember that we are part of God's eternal, cosmic plan of salvation, we realise that every small act contributes to God's larger vision. One of the best ways to keep eternity in mind is to practice invocation in every situation and moment. As we invite God's Spirit into each task and interaction, we cannot help but be aware of God's larger dream at work in us. Try this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, and fill every moment of my life with eternal significance.

Saturday 05 November 2016

Reading: Luke 20:1-8

Reflection: Jesus' ministry disturbed the religious leaders in many ways. It wasn't just that he was popular, which undermined their

influence. They were also concerned that he was doing things that made people think he was the Messiah, while doing other things that – in their minds – the Messiah shouldn't do. He mixed with sinners, outcasts and traitors to the people. He touched people that were unclean, and gave women an equal place with men. He seemed, in some ways, to completely ignore the law while claiming that he was actually fulfilling it. It was all very confusing and frightening for them, especially since any talk of a Messiah was likely to result in a violent Roman crackdown. When he cleared the Temple, things got really scary, and so, they decided to question his authority – whether Jesus believed he was acting under the authority of God or not.

But Jesus knew two things that gave him deep insight into this situation. The first was that the religious leaders did not want to lose the respect of the people, and the second was that God's life is not controlled or contained by human authorities and structures. And so he challenged them with his question about John, knowing that they would be unable to answer him. He didn't win any friends among the leaders by the way he dealt with them, but he did make it clear to the people that God calls us to trust in God's life, and not to live by what wins us friends, position or influence in human systems. When resurrection life breaks out, nothing can stop it, and we need to be prepared for a surprising and exhilarating ride!

How can you dive into God's life today?

Practice for Today: If we try to use our faith as a protection from anything surprising, unexpected or difficult, we will be sorely disappointed just like the religious leaders. But, when we allow God's life to guide and inspire us we may not feel comfortable or secure, but we will know the joy and excitement of truly abundant life. Today, try to listen to the whispers of God's life – in Scripture, in nature and through other people – and follow where God guides.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Lead me deeper into your life, O God, that I may bring life to others.

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