

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
06-12 November 2016

Thought for the Week:

What does eternity look like for you? Do you imagine lots of clouds and harps, with us all floating around as disembodied spirits in white robes? This may be a comical image, but the idea that our bodies are temporary and our spirits are eternal is widespread and persistent. But, this is not the message of the New Testament. Rather, the Scriptures teach a shocking truth, which we call resurrection - that our bodies (and, indeed the entire universe) are eternal and are raised from death in a glorified state in the end.

The message of resurrection is not just about what happens after we die. If our entire beings (including our bodies) are eternal, then the physical world has value to God. And that means that it matters how we treat our bodies and those of others, and how we use the natural resources of our planet. But, resurrection is not just something with which we agree in our heads. Resurrection is a truth that we live in every moment, as we choose either to cooperate with God's life or to ignore it or oppose it. Whenever we contribute life to others, we work with God's resurrection life. Whenever we make some else's life poorer, we oppose God's resurrection.

This week resurrection will be the focus of our meditations.

Sunday 06 November 2016

Reading: Luke 20:27-38

Reflection: The question the Sadducees posed to Jesus was intended to place him squarely in the political and religious landscape of his day. There was a great dispute between the Pharisees, who believed in resurrection, and the Sadducees, who didn't. But, while Jesus' response affirmed the resurrection, and so seemed to align with the Pharisees, his comments went far beyond what the Pharisees believed. So, Jesus stepped out of the religious dispute of these two factions, and challenged them both to seek a deeper understanding of God and God's life. If they had listened to

him, they would have discovered not just a hope for eternity, but a whole new way of living this side of the grave.

The scenario the Sadducees described could well have happened in Jesus' day. It was based on a law called that required a widow to marry her deceased husband's brother in order to bear children to continue the dead man's lineage. In their literalism, though, the Sadducees imagined confusion in eternity when all seven brothers could potentially claim this woman as their wife. However, Jesus cut through this in two ways. Firstly, he describes what life is like in eternity. He doesn't say that we *become* angels, but that we are *like* angels in the sense that we do not die, and that we no longer need legal protections like marriage contracts. Secondly, he teaches that, in God's Reign, people are not "given in marriage". In other words, no one is ever another person's property in the way wives were the property of husbands in his time. The dignity and humanity that Jesus describes comes from the life of God that lives in everyone, and that requires us to recognise the inherent value and freedom of every person. This is what it means to believe in resurrection!

How can you view other people through the lens of resurrection today, and honour their dignity and freedom?

Practice for Today: When we speak words of blessing to others, we uplift them and enhance their lives. And, when we recognise that they, too, are eternal beings created by God, it becomes much easier to bless them. Today, take a moment to recognise God's life in everyone you meet, and then try to bless them in some way.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I bless everyone I meet, because your resurrection life flows through them, O God.

Monday 07 November 2016

Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Reflection: If the words of today's reading give us any indication, Peter must have treasured his experience of Jesus' transfiguration throughout his life. Certainly, he refers back to it here as something that confirmed, for him, the truth of the prophet's message about the Messiah and his mission. More than that, it was this experience that gave him confidence to continue believing in Christ's resurrection

life. And that's why Peter calls his readers back to the words of the prophets. They wrote about the life, work and death of the Messiah before it happened, because they were inspired by God's Spirit. This means that, in their humanness, they caught a glimpse of God's life and how it would grow and thrive on earth in the midst of death and evil and suffering, and they were moved - inspired - to write it down and pass on what they had come to believe.

What is so important about the prophets' words is that, when they speak about God's life, they don't usually mean life after death. Rather, they envisioned a new world on this side of the grave in which God's life and justice filled the earth and brought joy and blessing to all people. This is not to say that their words don't apply to eternity, but that eternity begins now - in our ordinary daily lives as we live by the principles of God's Reign here and now.

How can you live so that you experience and reflect eternity today?

Practice for Today: When we fill our lives with praise, we automatically become more aware of eternity breaking out all around us. Today, allow the practice of praise to open your eyes to God's resurrection life and the glimpse of eternity it offers.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your life that brings eternity into the world here and now.

Tuesday 08 November 2016

Reading: 2 John 1-13

Reflection: This short letter from John communicates so much in a few words. At its heart, though, there are two main messages. The first is, as in all of John's writings, the commandment to love, which John views as the primary instruction for believers, and the main mark of our faith. The second message is that of the resurrection. It seems that some teachers were claiming that Jesus had not been truly human, with a real, physical body. This, of course, would have meant that Jesus could not have been physically resurrected, and so John makes the error of this thinking clear. His faith in the resurrection, and his concern for the believers to stay strong in their faith, comes through very clearly in these words.

Verse 10 may seem to contradict what John says about love, though. Here he tells the believers not to invite someone into their home, or to have anything to do with someone, who says that Jesus was not truly human. This doesn't seem like a very loving response at all! But, notice two things. Firstly, churches met in homes, and so John was asking them to keep false teachers out of the church. Secondly, John wanted to make sure that no false teachers could lead these believers away from Jesus. He was expressing love for the church, not lack of love for the false teachers.

It's hard when love for one person seems to deny love to another, but when we defend the vulnerable this is how it may appear. Our challenge is to love both those who are threatened and those who cause threats, while protecting the vulnerable. This nurtures God's life and brings freedom to all. How can you love like this today?

Practice for Today: When we serve others, it is an act of love. Sometimes our service takes the form of protecting or defending those who are under threat, and sometimes our service takes the form of standing against those who threaten others. In both cases our goal is to love the other person to God's resurrection life. Today, seek to serve all people by loving them in the way that best leads them to life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Help me to love others, in protecting goodness or in opposing evil, and to lead them to life, O God.

Wednesday 09 November 2016

Reading: John 5:19-29

Reflection: If our view of God does not line up with what we see in Jesus, our view of God is wrong. That's effectively what Jesus says in today's reading. Jesus claimed only to do what he saw his divine parent doing. He claimed that as God gave life, so he also had authority to give life. And, once we have connected with the life of Jesus, we are connected with the life of God. So, anytime we claim that God says or does something that contradicts Jesus' message, we've missed the point. In Jesus, God has revealed God's Self most completely and openly, and so Christ must shape our view of God.

In a week where we focus on God's resurrection life, this is important, because it reveals that God's life was not just at work in Jesus, but that Jesus, as much as the Creator God, is the source of life. This means that resurrection is not just a historical event. It's a daily reality! No matter who we are, or what we've done, God's life flows through us (if it didn't we would cease to exist). However, when we fail to recognise this, and when we live in destructive ways, we prevent ourselves from experiencing the power of God's life in our own lives. This is why Jesus speaks about the "dead" hearing his voice. It's not just the physically dead who must hear and be raised by Jesus, but those who, while they are still physically alive, live without knowledge or access to the life of God. So, we all need to hear Jesus' voice and allow his Spirit to fill us, daily, with life.

How can you open your ears, and your life, to God's resurrection today?

Practice for Today: Jesus' voice comes to us in so many ways - through creation, through other people, through circumstances. But, unless, we have learned to recognise the voice of Christ, we can easily miss it. That's why the Scriptures are such a gift. They teach us to recognise how God speaks and what God says, so that when we hear Christ's life-giving voice, we can respond. Today, listen for God's voice as you read the Bible.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I listen for your voice, O God, so that your resurrection life may flood through me.

Thursday 10 November 2016

Reading: Romans 1:18-25

Reflection: This section of Romans, and the verses that follow it, have been used to judge and condemn people in the name of Jesus for far too long. There are two reasons why this has happened. Firstly, we have failed to connect the apostle's words here with the gracious message of Jesus, and, secondly, we have taken these words out of context and failed to understand them well. As we shift our gaze from this week's focus on resurrection to Sunday's warnings about false messiahs and giving in to evil, this passage in Romans can help us, if we will let it.

There are three important points to note about this reading. Firstly, the apostle is addressing people who, knowing the truth about God's grace and life in Christ, seek deliberately to suppress it for their own wicked ends. These are people who actively seek to do harm to others and to live without any constraints on their own selfish, self-centred desires. Secondly, the primary wickedness that the apostle addresses is idolatry - turning from any reference to God and choosing to give our lives for what is temporary, selfish and ultimately meaningless. Finally, the apostle is not primarily concerned with "sinners", but with people in the church who judge others while doing the exact same things (see 2:1)! So, before we use these verses to condemn anyone else, we had better examine our own hearts and see where we have rejected God's life, where we have chosen to worship ideas about God that are unworthy of God, and where we have worshipped idols instead of the God of grace and life. Until we have removed what brings death from our own hearts we cannot really bring God's life to anyone else.

How can you remove anything that brings death from your heart and life today?

Practice for Today: Sometimes we may choose judgement and blame because it's much easier and safer than self-examination, confession and repentance. But, this does not bring life - to us or to those around us. Today, try a different choice: turn your gaze within to see what robs you and others of life, and turn to God in confession and repentance.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Show me, O God, what robs me and others of life, and teach me to choose life instead of death.

Friday 11 November 2016

Reading: Isaiah 12

Reflection: When God's people were threatened with invasion, and the king was tempted to align with more powerful nations for protection, Isaiah spoke a word of caution and faith to the people. He spoke about how, if they trusted in God's grace and care, they would survive the onslaught. He promised a leader, like the great king David, who would rebuild the nation into a prosperous and peaceful land. And he described the joy and celebration that would

come if they held on to their hope and placed their trust in God's ways. Today's reading is the last part of this comforting message.

Notice how the prophet acknowledges that the reason the people were in trouble in the first place was because of their failure to live according to God's ways of justice and peace - in verse 1 he refers to God's anger at the people. But, in spite of this, God seeks to save and restore them, and so Isaiah offers them a vision of a coming time when they would praise God for God's salvation, and rejoice at God's presence. It is important to remember this dynamic whenever we read the prophecies of judgement in the Bible, and when we face times of turmoil. It is never God's desire that we, or anyone else, be destroyed. But, if we choose to live in destructive ways, God will not stop us facing the consequences. So, whatever we may be dealing with in our lives, and our world, at the moment, we need only place our trust in God, and continue to faithfully follow the way of Jesus, and we know that we will come through it in the end.

How can you remember your hope and commit to stay faithful Jesus' way today?

Practice for Today: One of the great gifts of the practice of prayer is that, when life's circumstances become so overwhelming that we can't see past them, prayer lifts our gaze to God and the hope we have in Christ. This is especially true when we are able to pray beyond our own personal needs, and start to intercede for others and for our world. Try this today and see how it strengthens you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In the midst of turmoil, I pray and place my trust in you, O God.

Saturday 12 November 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 10:1-9

Reflection: When the Temple was destroyed and God's people were carried into exile, it was a moment of absolute despair for them. They believed that the only way this could have happened was if God's glory and presence had left the Temple - which is part of what is depicted in Ezekiel's vision. But, the way God was revealed to Ezekiel turned the whole scenario around. While God was seen to be leaving the Temple, the vision also showed God's

glory riding on strange angelic beings with wheels. Clearly the prophet was struggling to describe what he actually saw, but three features clarify the message.

Firstly, the wheels could move in any direction without turning, which meant that they could go anywhere with ease. Secondly, both the wheels and the cherubim were covered with eyes, which represents God's ability to see all. And thirdly, the cherubim had four faces, an ox (representing domestic animals), a lion (representing wild animals), an eagle (representing the birds), and a human (representing humanity). This meant that God was watching over, and moving through all of creation - not just the people of Judah, and not just Jerusalem. So, while the people felt abandoned because they believed God had left the Temple, God was actually showing them that there was nowhere that they could go where God could not reach them, see them or care for them.

When we face tough times, and when evil seems to flourish, we, too, can be tempted to believe that God has abandoned us. But, if we can allow Ezekiel's strange vision to speak to us, we will be reassured that nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love and presence. How can you remember this truth throughout today?

Practice for Today: The practice of invocation is meant to remind us of God's presence and accessibility, and to open our hearts and lives to the Spirit's work. When we face times when God feels distant, invocation can remind us that God is always with us, and it can help us become aware of God's care again. Today, try to remember to invoke God's presence throughout the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I forget your presence and love, O God, may your Spirit awaken my awareness and remind me that you are here.

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