

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
13-19 November 2016

Thought for the Week:

In the midst of a turbulent world it can be very difficult to hold on to hope and to continue to do the right thing when so many people around us are living by the values of expediency and self-centredness. Contrary to what some preachers may say, Jesus did not promise to protect us from the pain of living in such difficult times. The Gospel reading for this Sunday makes that very clear. But, what Jesus did promise was that we would be empowered by God's Spirit to stay faithful and to witness to the world about the way of Jesus and the life it brings.

It may feel daunting to face the call to be a witness to Christ, but this doesn't mean that God is asking you to stand on street corners and preach. Rather, in the midst of a world of suffering, our best witness is to reject selfishness and think of others, to reject despair and continue to hope, to reject violence and work for peace, and to reject division and hatred in favour of love for those around us. These Christlike attitudes and actions do not require dramatic efforts. They are expressed in the simple routines of our daily lives.

This week we will meditate on living as people who witness, in our daily interactions and routines, to Christ's love and hope.

Sunday 13 November 2016

Reading: Luke 21:5-19

Reflection: It's amazing how, in spite of their history, the people of Israel still revered the Temple so highly. It's not that it was wrong for them to appreciate having a place to gather and to worship, but the Temple had tended to become an object of worship in itself. When it was destroyed at the time of the exile it threw the people into despair because they believed that, with no Temple, God could not longer be available to them. It took a number of prophets to remind them that God was not confined to a building. In today's reading, we see that the same reverence for the Temple remained in the hearts

of God's people. How shocking it must have sounded for the disciples when Jesus spoke so confidently and easily about the coming destruction of this grand edifice. Jesus' words were fulfilled in the war of 66 - 70 AD, when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

When Jesus spoke about these terrible events, he offered his followers no promise of escape or protection. Rather, he called them to remain faithful and to witness to God's grace and love through the turmoil. Persecution was to be seen as an opportunity to share faith, and betrayal was a chance to show the power of God by remaining faithful and loving throughout.

It's important for us to remember this call of Jesus as we face trials today. Few of us will be threatened with death for our faith, but we will be tempted to respond to the taunts and betrayals of friends and opponents with anger and vengeance. But, the way of Christ calls us to respond, even to our antagonists, with grace and love. How can you do this today?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to express love to others - especially those who oppose or persecute us - is to speak words of blessing (benedictions) over them. When people see that we won't play their antagonistic game, it often softens their hearts and stirs an interest in the way of Jesus. Try to speak blessing over everyone you encounter today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Bless everyone I interact with today, O God, whether friend or foe.

Monday 14 November 2016

Reading: Isaiah 60:17-22

Reflection: Perhaps the greatest enemy to living as people of faith, hope and love is fear. When we allow our fear to overwhelm us and to drive our decisions and actions we inevitably begin to act in ways that are contrary to Jesus' teaching, and our hearts easily fall into despair and self-protection. This is why the Bible constantly speaks hope to God's people, even when strong words of correction have been necessary. In the book of Isaiah, which was probably written by at least three writers, spanning a period of history from before the

exile to the return, we see many words of confrontation and judgement from God, but throughout there is also the grand hope of a new world under God's just and loving rulership. The last few chapters of Isaiah paint some of the most glorious images of hope in the entire Bible, and today's reading is one of these. Visions like these are what keep us true to God's dream, and keep the fires of hope and love alive in our hearts.

All the images in this prophecy are of plenty, of peace, and of a thriving people. For a people who were dealing with the aftermath of a devastating war, and a long season as refugees in a foreign land, these images may have seemed impossible. They were certainly far removed from the reality they were experiencing. But, the prophet invites them to believe in God's good intentions for them, and to hold on to their faith in order that it may inspire them to rebuild and to live as the people God had created them to be. No good thing ever came out of despair! As we face the challenges of a world in economic crisis, in climate crisis, in crises of war and of religious conflict, we also need visions like these to remind us of God's purpose for the world, and to keep us true to the way of Jesus.

How can you nurture faith, hope and love in your heart today?

Practice for Today: As followers of Jesus it is crucial for us to remember that our hope is never based on ourselves alone, but is ultimately rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it is the practice of praise that keeps us mindful of this hope. Why not spend today in a constant attitude of praise for Jesus and his dream of peace and justice for our world?

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your dream of peace and justice, and for the hope it gives me.

Tuesday 15 November 2016

Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Reflection: The issue of whether a Christian should eat food that had been sacrificed to idols was a big one in the Corinthian church, where such meat was regularly sold in the marketplaces. But, Paul avoids the legalism that so easily arises around such issues and speaks to the real matter that should concern us as followers of

Jesus - the impact of what we do on others. He affirms the freedom that we have in Christ, but calls us to be willing to limit our freedom for the sake of others, in order to demonstrate Christ's love for them. The key verse in today's reading is verse 31: "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

If something offends someone else we are to refrain from doing it in his or her sight. We are to seek to avoid giving offense to anyone (a tough order that we won't always achieve) and to please everyone with everything we do. This is what Paul tried to do (and even he didn't always succeed) and he calls the believers to imitate him in his imitation of Jesus. The final motivation for being willing to limit our own freedom is to seek to do what is best for others so that they may come to know the grace and love of Christ through us. If we could just adopt this one attitude as our primary way of relating to others, how different do you think people's attitudes to Christians might be?

How can you try to please everyone you meet in everything you do today?

Practice for Today: The basic principle of the Gospel that Jesus taught was this: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." It is so simple and profound that it has been quoted across the world. Yet it remains a very difficult principle to live out - which is why so few seem to manage it. Today, make this the guiding principle of all your actions and decisions, and see how it affects you and those with whom you interact.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you gave up your freedom for my sake, Jesus, so I willingly limit my freedom for the sake of others, in your name.

Wednesday 16 November 2016

Reading: Ezekiel 43:1-12

Reflection: At a time when God's people despaired of ever returning to their homeland, and to the good days of peace and prosperity, Ezekiel began to speak of God's restoration. Although he had spoken many prophecies of judgement and confrontation of the nation's sin and injustice, he now turned to the future and looked at

what God desired for God's people. At the heart of his message was a vision of a glorious, renewed Temple. When we remember that, for the Israelites, the Temple was more than just a place of worship, but was the centre of their whole society and culture, we see that this vision was a powerful way to proclaim God's desire to restore the people.

After the evocative vision of the dry bones that come to life in Chapter 37, Ezekiel began to describe, in great detail, the new Temple, the restoration of the priesthood, and the renewed worship life of Israel. Then he described the vision of God's glory returning, which is the focus of today's reading. Two features of this vision stand out. The first is the constant theme of repentance that flows through it. God's glory is available and visible when God's people are willing to grow beyond their worst selves through the practice of repentance. The second feature of this vision is the way God promises to live in the Temple. This doesn't mean that God is not present elsewhere. Rather, it speaks about God's presence and purpose being at the centre of the life of God's people.

When we place God at the centre of our lives, and constantly grow more Christ-like through the practice of repentance, then God's glory is revealed in and through us to the world. How can you become a better reflection of God's glory today?

Practice for Today: There can be no growth and no transformation into reflections of God's glory without repentance. It is only when we are willing to acknowledge what needs to change in us, and then allow God's Spirit to do the work of change, that we can become more and more like Jesus, and reflect his character and mission to the world. Today, make time for repentance and the growth it nurtures.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I turn away from all that obscures your glory from being reflected in me, O God.

Thursday 17 November 2016

Reading: Hebrews 9:23-28

Reflection: This coming Sunday is the last of the year in the Church Calendar - the celebration of the Reign of Christ. One thing that

stands out, when we explore Jesus' Reign, is how different it is from human empires. Today's reading from Hebrews demonstrates this in a dramatic way. Human leaders have armies and bodyguards, all of whom willingly give their lives to ensure that the leader remains alive. But Jesus gives his life for his followers in order to bring life to them. It's a complete turn-around!

The book of Hebrews spends a lot of time looking at the Israelite sacrificial system in order to explain Christ's death and resurrection. Much of the focus is on the shedding of blood, which in the Old Testament was a prerequisite for forgiveness. This was a step forward from other religions of the region in which it was not animals but children that were sacrificed. But, in Jesus, God takes us a step further even than that. Because of God's grace revealed in Jesus, and the willingness of Christ to give his life, we now know that God requires no sacrifice for forgiveness to happen. Forgiveness is freely offered to all based on God's love, not on anything we could ever do - including sacrifices - to earn it.

Are there any ways in your life that you're trying to earn God's approval through sacrifice? How can you release this?

Practice for Today: One of the most important and moving moments in any worship gathering is when, after the prayer of confession, the absolution (or assurance of forgiveness) is spoken over the congregation. This confirms for us that we are accepted by God because of God's grace, but it also teaches us to be people who, more easily, speak forgiveness over one another. Today, be free with your forgiveness toward others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you forgive me freely because of your grace, O God, so I forgive others.

Friday 18 November 2016

Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Reflection: The writer of the first letter of Peter sought to encourage followers of Christ who were living in a hostile world. Persecution was a constant threat, and the temptation to question Jesus' sovereignty and love was ever-present. But this writer knew that it was only the believers' faith in Christ and his purposes that would

sustain them. He begins by reminding them of God's great mercy and the grace that has come to us in Jesus. Then he draws their attention to the hope we have that Christ will be revealed to the entire world, and God's Reign will finally be a reality that covers the earth. Then, he offers comfort by assuring them of God's strength and protection. These words must have been a wonderful gift to those who sought to remain faithful, but were afraid of what could be done to them because of their faith.

Notice, though, that in spite of all these words of comfort, the writer does not promise that there will be no suffering. On the contrary, he tells the believers to expect trials, and he encourages them to be joyful in the midst of them. It is a powerful thing to be able to rejoice even when those who oppose Christ's way are antagonising you.

How can you remind yourself today of Christ's Reign and rejoice, even though this world is a painful place?

Practice for Today: One of the most powerful tools we have for navigating difficult times is the practice of thanksgiving. When we give thanks we remember God's grace and we build up our faith in the Reign of God that works in us and through us. Use every opportunity to give thanks today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, God for your grace and your Reign that are always at work in and through me.

Saturday 19 November 2016

Reading: Luke 18:15-17

Reflection: It took a long time for Jesus' disciples to really grasp what God's Reign was all about. Not even three years of living with Jesus and hearing his teaching could drive it home. It was only when they really began to live this reality together that they began to understand it - and then it changed the world. But it is not just the disciples who found it hard to understand. Throughout the ages, followers of Jesus have always struggled to really "get" God's Reign and to live it out in their daily lives. One of the reasons for this is that God's Reign is completely different from what we're used to in human empires. In the ways of women and men, it is the leader, the strong, the adult, the wealthy and the powerful who are the

examples of what life should be. But, in the Reign of Christ, it is children who reveal the principles and values that guide us. This was so surprising and shocking that the disciples tried to send the children away when they came for blessing. But, Jesus gently rebuked them, and taught them one of the most important lessons of living in God's Reign - it must be accepted with the faith, wonder, and willingness to give up control that come so naturally to children.

Unfortunately we still struggle to embrace faith like this. We prefer to be in control. We prefer not to be surprised. We prefer to know with certainty. And by doing this, we miss out on the wonder, the joy and the breath-taking beauty of living God's way. But, when we can release our need for knowledge, certainty and control, and when we can begin to live with childlike humility and trust, we discover a whole new quality of life. We also begin to bring life to others as we invite them to share our joy, our playfulness, our trust and our openness to love. This is what the Reign of Christ looks like!

How can you become more childlike in the way you "receive" God's Reign?

Practice for Today: Christian worship regularly includes acts of dedication. This is not because we already have everything worked out and we know we can fulfil what we promise in our own strength. Rather it's because we long to be more than we are and, by committing more deeply to God, we open ourselves to be inspired and changed. Why not go through today constantly committing yourself to receiving God's Reign like a child?

Breath-Prayer for Today: I receive your Reign in my life, O God, like a little child.

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