

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

01 - 07 January 2017

Thought for the Week:

This week we begin a New Year and so this week's reflections call us to choose how we will commit to living through the year to come. At the heart of this choice is a challenge to recognise God's presence and activity in our lives and our world, and the openness to hear how God may be leading us. Then, flowing from this awareness, we are called courageously to follow God's guidance, and to lead others to a deeper, more abundant life in Christ.

Then, at the end of the week, we celebrate the Epiphany – the moment in the Church Calendar when we remember the visit of the Magi to Jesus – and we begin a season of learning to see how God's glory was reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus. Here there is another challenge – to be those who both witness the glory of God in Jesus, and who, like Jesus, allow God's glory to be reflected in our own lives.

How we respond to these challenges will make all the difference for 2017. This week we are encouraged to make the right choice and choose Jesus' priorities, values, and practices for our own.

Sunday 01 January 2017

Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a

Reflection: There is a sense in which the start of a new year is like stepping into a new world. Whatever happened in the year that is past is now gone, and the year ahead is still waiting to be created. Although there is really very little difference between the last day of one year and the first day of the next, these moments make profound differences to how we experience the world. Somehow, marking the change of a year really does give us new opportunities, new possibilities, and new energy for what lies ahead.

But, as followers of Christ, there is a much deeper significance to these transition moments. As the author of Revelation wrote to the

early believers in their suffering and persecution, he sought to open their awareness to a deeper reality that was at work in their world – the Reign of God. As he described heaven and earth becoming new and becoming one, he sought to reveal that, no matter what struggles the churches faced, God was with them, and God's purposes were working out among them. In a similar way, as we stand at the start of this New Year, we are invited to open our awareness to God's presence that is with us, and God's purposes that are being worked out among us. And, as we look toward what lies ahead, we are invited to commit to work with God, to allow God's Reign to be revealed a little more through our lives.

How can you live a little more consciously in the awareness of God's presence and purpose this year?

Practice for Today: If we are to be aware of God with us and working through us, we will need to listen carefully to the promptings of God's Spirit. As we read the Scriptures and spend time in stillness, we may begin to discern God's guidance for the months ahead. It can be very helpful to begin the year with this kind of reflection. Why not do it today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: I watch for your presence, and listen for your guidance, O God.

Monday 02 January 2017

Reading: Genesis 12:1-7

Reflection: When we start to think about listening to God's guidance, we may be tempted to look for a blueprint for our lives that we simply need to follow like a "paint-by-numbers" picture in order to be happy and secure. This is definitely not what the Scriptures promise. The story of Abram, who became Abraham, is often referred to in the Scriptures, and it offers a metaphor for how God works in the lives of all of God's people. How Abram heard God's call we do not know, but he felt strongly enough about what God was telling him to do that he packed up his wife and nephew, left his relatives behind, and set off for a foreign country. Somehow he knew that his life was to be used by God, and so he left with no clear understanding of where he would be going. All he had to hold on to was God's promise that God had a purpose for him and his family.

As you look ahead to this year, you may have a relatively good idea of where you will be living, and what you will be doing. Or you may be in a time of transition and uncertainty, with no clear picture of what your life will be. Either way, we all know that the life we have can be replaced by something unfamiliar at a moment's notice. We also know that every life has value to God, and can be a channel through which God's grace and love can be revealed to the world.

As you prepare yourself for the year to come, pray for those with whom you live, work and play, asking that God would reveal God's love through you. Be sure to open yourself to any new ideas or actions that God might call you to this year.

Practice for Today: While we may not know what lies ahead, our prayers are not bound by time. As we open our lives to God's power through the practice of prayer, we often find that we are guided, even when we don't know it, in the way that we need to go. Sometimes, it will only be when we look back that we will see how God's guidance has worked, but as we pray, we can trust that God will be working in and through us even when we can't see it. Exercise your faith by praying like this today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Guide me, O God, through whatever terrain I must navigate this year.

Tuesday 03 January 2017

Reading: Psalm 72

Reflection: This Psalm, attributed to Solomon, expresses the great blessing that good leaders bring to their people. In this specific case, the leadership that the Psalmist prays for is inspired and empowered by God, and by God's Reign of justice and love. As we read through the history of God's people, we can easily see that when the kings lived according to God's dream, the nation enjoyed the benefits, but when the kings went their own way, the nation suffered. Ultimately Jesus alone demonstrates the kind of leadership that God promises to God's people, and in his ways we begin to experience God's dream of abundant life for ourselves.

The challenge of today's reading is to recognise that we are all leaders in some way. We all have people who look up to us, or for

whom we must take some responsibility. We all need God's love of justice, and God's power to treat others fairly, to protect the most vulnerable in our community and to bring life and joy to those under our care. Whenever we have influence over another person – whether as formally appointed leaders, or as an informal influence through our teaching or example – we must choose whether we will seek to lead them deeper into the kind of life that God dreams for them or use our position to control or exploit them. We may not deliberately seek to hurt others, but unless we consciously seek to serve and love them as Jesus did, we will probably not be the leaders they need. But, if we can help them to embrace God's dream for their lives, we will bless them immeasurably.

How can you lead like Jesus today?

Practice for Today: The most powerful leadership – as Jesus demonstrated – is that which serves others. When we consciously and intentionally seek opportunities to care for and uplift those around us, we reveal God's grace and love, and we experience the life of God flowing through us to others. Try to serve at every opportunity today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you serve me even though you are my king, Jesus, so may I serve those around me.

Wednesday 04 January 2017

Reading: Exodus 3:1-5

Reflection: For Moses, leading his flock out into the wilderness was just a regular day at the office. But, on one particular day he found himself at the mountain of God – although he didn't yet know it was a significant place. It was here that God drew his attention through the burning bush, and spoke the call that changed his life forever. But, before any of this happened, God challenged Moses to take notice of what was happening, and to pause in reverence. Moses didn't have to obey, of course. He could have run away, or simply shaken the whole thing off as a delusion and gone to lie under a bush until he felt better. But, something captured him, and he listened to God's instruction, took note of the moment, and ended up becoming the liberator of God's people.

In every life there are “burning bush” moments when we are called to pause and notice God’s presence and purpose for our lives. Like Moses, we can choose to ignore these divine interruptions, or we can allow them to lead us into a deeper connection with God and a deeper understanding of our part in God’s mission. The key is to remember that burning bushes appear in the routine of our ordinary lives, and to develop an openness and preparedness to engage them when they happen. Not all divine interruptions are as dramatic that which Moses experienced, but all of them leave us different. Sometimes we may just feel a deeper sense of peace and security within the world’s turmoil. Sometimes a sight of great beauty or wonder may strike us. Sometimes we are broken open by a moment of great love or grief. Whatever our burning bushes may be they always lead us into a life of greater abundance and contribution.

How can you open yourself to God’s burning bushes today?

Practice for Today: When we are stopped by a burning bush it is important that we take note of the moment, and listen carefully to what we sense God saying. This is why faithful Christ-followers have always used practices like journaling. When we take the time to write down our thoughts and experiences, we are better able to remember them, and to be shaped by them. Today take a few moments to journal any burning bush experiences you may have experienced recently.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When you interrupt me, O God, I willingly stop and take note of your word.

Thursday 05 January 2017

Reading: Hebrews 11:32-12:2

Reflection: Today we spend a moment in an in-between place. Over the last few days we have reflected on what it means to follow Jesus in this New Year. Tomorrow we turn our attention to the Epiphany – that moment in the Church Calendar when God’s glory is revealed through the Magi’s visit to worship Jesus. In next few weeks we will explore various ways that Jesus revealed God’s glory.

But, today, we turn to a challenging and uncomfortable passage from the letter to the Hebrews. Today’s reading began with the last

section of the “Faith Hall of Fame” in which the writer tells the stories of the Old Testament heroes and heroines of the faith. The start of today’s reading was a comforting description of all the victories of many of these faithful ones. But, then it went on to describe the suffering that some of them endured. While the first section would appear glorious and would build our faith for what the coming year may hold, the second is anything but glorious, and could leave us feeling very scared and uncertain about the future.

Then, at the beginning of Chapter 12 there is a challenge: because of these faithful ones, who now witness our faith journey, we are called to make the same commitment to follow Jesus’ way no matter what this year may hold. God’s glory is not just revealed in joy and victory, but also in suffering and defeat. This is because God’s glory is most clearly reflected when, like Jesus, we choose grace, compassion, justice, peace, and love regardless of how we may have been hurt, and no matter what the world brings to us.

Can you make a commitment to reflect God’s glory in all circumstances today?

Practice for Today: Making a commitment to follow Jesus is not just a once-off decision. Rather, we are called to “take up our cross” daily. This means that a regular practice of our faith should be to renew our dedication to Jesus’ way.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I commit again today to run the race you have set before me, O God, with dedication and endurance.

Friday 06 January 2017

Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Reflection: The Epiphany celebration, which happens today, ushers in a season of great importance. The next few weeks invite us to delve deeper into the mystery of Jesus, and to see how God’s glory was made known through him. The focus of Epiphany (the word means a sudden insight or revelation) is on the visit of the magi to the little boy Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel tells this story to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah who not only rescues God’s people, but who draws all people to God. The foreign sorcerers (magi), who are among the first to recognise and worship Jesus, would not have

been permitted into the Temple, but they were welcomed into the house where Jesus lived, and they willingly gave their gifts and their worship to this new king.

In today's reading, Isaiah speaks to the newly returned exiles of Israel. Although their world had been devastated, and the work of rebuilding was overwhelming, the prophet reminds them that God's glory is with them, and that they are still called to be a light to the nations. God promises that the people will return home and know God's presence, but also that people from around the world will come to trade and to bring gifts to God's people because of God's glory revealed in them. The mention of frankincense and gold resonates with the gifts of the magi, but the focus is on the peace and celebration that would result from the people's awareness of God's glory, not on the material wealth they would receive. In the same way, we are called to rejoice at God's presence and glory with us and within us. When we keep our hearts and minds connected with God, we discover peace and joy even when we are engaged in the tough work of healing and rebuilding, and others are drawn to the presence of God that they experience through us.

How can you experience and reflect God's glory today?

Practice for Today: When our lives are filled with praise, we automatically experience more of God's presence. This is because we constantly remind ourselves to see where God's glory is being manifest in our world. Then, as we notice God's light shining around and within us, we automatically help others to see it too. Today fill every moment with God's praises.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, and I celebrate your glory that shines in and through me.

Saturday 07 January 2017

Reading: 1 Kings 10:1-13

Reflection: As Solomon's reputation for wisdom spread through the world, foreign dignitaries came to experience it for themselves – and they weren't disappointed. One of these visitors was the Queen of Sheba, who had heard of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, but was overwhelmed by what she saw. The biblical narrative stresses that

Solomon's achievements brought honour to God's name. Solomon's wisdom and the prosperity he brought to the nation were seen, in the Old Testament worldview, as a sign of God's blessing and a manifestation of God's glory. The impact of this on the Queen of Sheba was profound – she praised Solomon's God, and remarked on God's love for God's people. Notice also that Solomon used some of the gifts he was given to enhance the worship life of Israel. Unfortunately, though, his devotion to God did not remain so strong. Later in his life he allowed his many wives to draw him into worship of some of the deities of the surrounding peoples. His wisdom, it seems, did not stretch to his faith or his relationships.

It would be a mistake to translate the Old Testament view of God's glory – material blessing and political power – into today's world. In this view, Jesus would not be seen to have revealed God's glory at all! But, the Gospels make it clear that Jesus made God's glory known as never before – and it was in his sacrifice and love that God's glory was seen. The truth that does not change, though, is that when God's glory is seen in someone's life, other people are drawn to God. As the Magi were drawn to worship Jesus as a child, so, when the light of God's glory shines out of our lives, people are drawn to open themselves to God's love and grace.

How can you make God's glory known in your life today?

Practice for Today: If Jesus was the primary revealer of God's glory, then the best way we can show God's glory is to imitate Jesus' words, actions, and attitudes. Perhaps the most profound of these glory-revealing characteristics of Jesus was his spirit of forgiveness. Today, allow God's glory to shine through you as you forgive those who have hurt you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I have tasted your glory, O God, in your forgiveness of me, so may I make your glory known by forgiving.

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