

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

08 - 14 January 2017

Thought for the Week:

The season after the Epiphany always begins with the story of Jesus' baptism. This story is significant for at least two reasons. The first is that it reveals very clearly that Jesus is the one who reveals God's glory to us, and it proclaims, loud and clear, how God viewed Jesus - as God's beloved son. The second significant feature of this story is the way Jesus was empowered to be the reflection of God's glory that he was. The outpouring of God's Spirit was the start of Jesus' ministry, but it was not just for Jesus. The book of Acts shows God's people receiving similar empowerment by God's Spirit, as Jesus had promised, and many of the epistles encourage us to be filled with God's Spirit. Like Jesus, if we are to reflect God's glory to our world, we will need God's Spirit to strengthen and guide us.

As dramatic as the experience of baptism was to Jesus, Matthew's telling indicates that it was only Jesus who saw the dove and heard the voice - which means that it was actually a moment of hidden glory. No one else would have been aware in that moment of how God's glory was being revealed in Jesus' life. In the same way, we do not need to draw attention to ourselves, or find places of prominence to reflect God's glory. We simply need to allow God's Spirit to fill every corner of our lives, and then God's glory will shine out in gentle, quiet, but transforming ways.

This week we open ourselves to God's Spirit so that God's glory can fill every part of our days.

Sunday 08 January 2017

Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

Reflection: It may be tempting to let ourselves off the hook of following Jesus by affirming his divinity. It is good to recognise the way God was uniquely present in and through Jesus, but the Scriptures make it very clear that when he was at work in Israel, it

was as a human being with all the limitations that implies. This is why the story of Jesus' baptism is so important. To begin with, as Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan, he was standing with all of humanity. He refused to set himself apart from us. Instead he underwent the same moment of change that we all must experience. He opened himself to God's Spirit and he committed himself to God's ways. Even when John noted his greatness, he insisted that John treat him the same way as everyone else. Then, before he began his ministry, Jesus received the filling of God's Spirit, and was driven by that same Spirit into the wilderness to have his commitment to God's ways tested and strengthened.

All of this means that there was nothing that was true of the human Jesus that is not also true for us. He had no special, divine "head start" on this human journey, and everything he did, was done as an ordinary human being empowered by God's Spirit. That's why Jesus calls us to follow him - because his way is as possible for us as it was for him, if we will let the Spirit to empower us in the same way.

How can you open yourself to the empowerment of God's Spirit today?

Practice for Today: The Gospels make it clear that the gift of God's Spirit is not only for some, and is not something for which we must beg God. Jesus promised that whoever asks will receive, so all we have to do is ask. The prayer of invocation, which can and should be prayed everyday, is just that - asking God for the filling of God's Spirit. Go through today with an invocation in your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Fill me, empower me, and make me a reflection of God's glory, Holy Spirit.

Monday 09 January 2017

Reading: Genesis 35:1-15

Reflection: Jacob started out life as a trickster who stole his father's blessing from his older brother Esau. When he fled from Esau's anger, he encountered God in his dreams one night, and called that place Bethel, which means "the house of God". Then, after many years of living in a foreign land, God called Jacob to return home. He made peace with his brother and settled again in his homeland.

But, finally God took him back to Bethel and affirmed again the promise God had made to Jacob's grandfather Abraham. It was in this second visitation at Bethel that God confirmed Jacob's name change to Israel (which probably means "One who struggles with God", while Jacob means "Deceiver").

It took a lot of work for God to prepare Jacob to be the father of the nation of Israel. But, in spite of his dubious beginnings, God willingly took the time and effort to change this man into one who could be used by God. Jacob's story can be a source of great comfort to us, because it reminds us that anyone - even those who have dubious beginnings like Jacob - can be a reflection of God's glory to the world, and can be used by God to fulfil God's purposes.

How can you open yourself to God's presence and glory a little more today?

Practice for Today: One thing that keeps us open to God's work in our lives is an awareness of God's presence and of the work that God has already done in the past. When we recognise how God has been active in our lives, it builds our faith and gives us the courage and strength to allow ourselves to be used by God even more. The power of thanksgiving is that it gives us this awareness. Take time today to give thanks for all the ways God has worked in your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your presence that has always been at work in me, O God, I give you thanks.

Tuesday 10 January 2017

Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Reflection: The prophet Jeremiah was a young man when God first called him, but he went on to have one of the longest, most difficult, and most effective ministries of all the prophets. Today we read the account of his call. Two things stand out in this conversation with God. Firstly, God revealed to Jeremiah that he had been known by God from before his birth, and that it was God who had formed him for a specific purpose. There is a sense in which this is true for all of us. We are all born with genetic abilities and qualities which we have not chosen, but that make us particularly well suited for certain tasks. If we offer these abilities to God, then, in the power of God's

Spirit, our talents become valuable instruments in God's mission.

The second feature of Jeremiah's call is that God was completely unconcerned with Jeremiah's youth. Unlike our society, Jeremiah's culture viewed young people as irresponsible and unable to make any valuable contribution to the world. The youngest in any family was often thought of as the least, but time and again we see God choosing these young ones, these overlooked ones, to be God's chosen instruments. It's good for us to remember that God is not worried about our excuses - our youth or old age, our lack of specific qualities or qualifications, or our feelings of inadequacy. Every one of us has the ability and the opportunity to participate in God's saving mission, if we will just make ourselves available and open ourselves to the power of God's Spirit.

How can you offer yourself to God as an instrument of salvation today?

Practice for Today: No matter what other gifts or abilities you may have - or lack - there is at least one ministry that every follower of Jesus can share: the ministry of prayer. Today open yourself to God's Spirit and allow God to guide and empower your prayers, as you lift up the people and situations in your world that need God's grace and love.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Fill my prayers with your power, O God, and work through them to bring love and grace to others.

Wednesday 11 January 2017

Reading: Matthew 12:15-21

Reflection: The book of Isaiah has a number of passages that are known as "Servant Songs". It is not known to whom these passages originally referred, but by Jesus' time they were recognised as prophecies of the coming Messiah, because they referred to the coming of a servant of God who would save God's people and restore them to faithfulness to God's ways. The most famous of these "Servant Songs" is found in Isaiah 53, but in today's reading the writer of Matthew's Gospel quotes another one - from Isaiah 42. When we remember that Matthew was writing to convince his readers that Jesus was the promised Messiah, it makes sense that

he would quote the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah.

But, in today’s reading there is a twist because Jesus was so different from the Messiah that the people were expecting. Instead of drawing attention to himself, Jesus often moved on as soon as he began to draw too much interest. In this particular case, he had been in conflict with the religious leaders and they had begun plotting to take his life. So, Jesus left that place, and as he touched people with God’s grace and healing on his travels, he instructed them to remain quiet. Jesus was engaged in world-changing, world-saving work. He was revealing, to those who cared to notice, that God’s Reign was among them, and that the Messiah had come. Yet, he constantly downplayed his work, and tried to keep things quiet. Jesus needed no publicity to accomplish his mission. He simply trusted in the power of God’s Spirit to draw people to him and to work through him.

How can you release any temptation to draw attention to yourself and trust in God’s Spirit to work in and through you today?

Practice for Today: One of Jesus’ most attractive qualities was his humility. It’s not surprising that we find this quality attractive in other people as well. Humility always seeks to bring life and blessing on others, without drawing benefit for itself. One of the best ways to nurture this quality in our hearts is to serve others in hidden ways. Today, try to do as much good for others as you can, but try to keep it a secret from everyone but God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May your gracious, life-giving humility be expressed in my life as it was in yours, Jesus.

Thursday 12 January 2017

Reading: Galatians 1:6-12

Reflection: When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, he didn’t waste time confronting what he saw as their most dangerous error - replacing the Gospel of Jesus with the Old Testament law. Teachers had arisen in this church who were telling the believers - especially the Gentiles - that they could not follow Christ unless they also obeyed the law and underwent circumcision. Paul explained very strongly that this teaching undermined the free gift of God’s grace

and the work of God’s Spirit in those who trusted in Christ. So committed was Paul to the grace of God that he spoke a curse against anyone who diluted or distorted the message of God’s grace.

Of course the question that is raised - and that Paul himself answers in many of his writings - is how the gifts of God’s Spirit and grace relate to the call to live Jesus’ mission of justice and love. Paul’s answer is simple: We do not receive God’s life through obeying any set of legalistic instructions. Rather God’s life comes to us through the free gift of Christ, and the presence of God’s Spirit which fills us. It is inevitable, though, that once we have tasted the life of Jesus, that we should seek to live as he did, and pass his life on to others. It is the Spirit who both reassures us of our place in God’s family, and who empowers us to serve and love the people around us. Receiving God’s life and living under the influence of God’s Spirit go together - and both are gifts of amazing grace.

How can you receive these gracious gifts of God a little more freely today? And how can you pass them on to others just as freely?

Practice for Today: The only way fall into legalism is if we forget how amazing and free God’s gift is. That is why we need to be constantly reminded of grace, and open our hearts to be filled by God’s Spirit. The practice of praise is a good way to do this work of remembering and opening. Spend today praising God for God’s amazing grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Spirit of God, fill me again and remind me of God’s amazing gift of grace and life.

Friday 13 January 2017

Reading: Acts 1:1-5

Reflection: John the Baptist proclaimed that the coming Messiah would baptise God’s people in the Holy Spirit. Now, right at the start of his second book, the writer of Luke and Acts draws attention to Jesus’ promise that his followers would receive God’s Spirit. Of course, very soon after this - in the next chapter - the writer describes the day of Pentecost when this gift was received. Notice, though, that Jesus instructed his disciples to wait for the coming of

the Spirit. This gift was important enough for Jesus that he called his disciples to do nothing until they had been filled - in spite of the fact that they had shared in his ministry of healing and proclamation while he was with them.

Both Jesus, and the writer of Acts, wanted to show that God's mission had been passed from Jesus to his followers. The disciples had taken on Jesus' mantle, so to speak, and were now the ones through whom God would bring life and grace into the world. But, they could not do this in their own strength, wisdom and ability. They would need divine empowerment for the work. The New Testament shows this pattern throughout: Jesus received God's Spirit and fulfilled his ministry; then he passed the work on to his disciples who also received God's Spirit; and, then, in turn, the disciples passed the mission on to others, who also received God's Spirit - right through to us today. God's calling, and God's power, are for all of us. All we need to do is accept them and allow God's love to shine through us.

How can you commit a little more to God's call today?

Practice for Today: Commitment is not a once-off, for-all-time thing. Rather, true commitment is renewed daily as we consciously and intentionally place our lives under God's authority. That's why we need the practice of dedication. When we get into the habit of daily saying "yes" to God, our lives begin to reflect God's love and touch others with God's wholeness. Renew your commitment to Christ again today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I accept your call and your Spirit, O God, and I commit to living as a witness to your life.

Saturday 14 January 2017

Reading: 1 Kings 19:19-21

Reflection: The Bible is filled with the stories of those who were called into God's service. Tomorrow's worship includes the calling of Peter and some of the other disciples, but today we focus on the call of Elisha. The great prophet Elijah had gone from victory over the prophets of Baal, to receiving a death threat from Jezebel the queen, which had sucked the life out of him. But God had come to

him, challenged him to stay committed to the cause, and had sent him back into ministry.

One of the comforting messages God gave Elijah was that there were other prophets who were still faithful and working for God's mission. Perhaps this made Elijah aware that he would need companionship in his work, or perhaps he began to recognise that it was time to train a successor, but, for whatever reason, he found Elisha and called him to be his apprentice. When he threw his cloak over Elisha's shoulders, this was a sign of the prophet's power that was being passed on to Elisha, but this was not the whole story. Elijah challenged his new helper to think seriously about what he was being called to do. Elisha, however, was ready and willing to follow, and he literally burned his old life and then set out on his new one. Following Jesus is like this. Although we may still do the work we have done before and live in the same neighbourhood and family, it is like all the values and habits from our old life are burned away and we are called to a whole new way of thinking and being. But, this change doesn't happen all at once. It takes a lifetime to learn to be Jesus' apprentice.

What do you need to burn today? And what new way of thinking or being do you need to pick up?

Practice for Today: The work of repentance is not just about what we have done wrong. Sometimes it's just that we discover that our values and priorities, which may not have hurt anyone, are not God's best for us, and we realise that we need to change. Repentance gives us the tools to lay aside our old way of being and to take on God's "cloak" - God's power for following Jesus. Take some time to do this work of repentance today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May anything that keeps me from wholehearted devotion to you be burned up, O God, as I take on your priorities and values.

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