

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
15 - 21 January 2017

Thought for the Week:

Answering the call to follow the Lamb of God, as Jesus' disciples did, is a daily decision made in the little details of how much we consume, what and how we buy, what we drive, where we live, what we eat, how we use energy, how we work, how we treat others and how we care for ourselves. Many of these decisions result in sacrifices that we would probably prefer to avoid. At its heart discipleship is about recognising that our faith is not an individual journey, but is connected into community. Our choice to sacrifice or not impacts others in our churches, neighbourhoods and world, and so we find that as we follow Christ, we are brought face to face with others, and the impact of our choices and lifestyle on them.

To make the sacrificial changes that will lead to a world of peace, justice and love – the world that Jesus proclaimed – we need resources beyond ourselves. For this it takes both the recognition that the Christ we follow is the Lamb of God who calls us to take up our crosses, and an openness to receive the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” – the transforming, empowering encounter with God – that John said Jesus would offer. But as we embrace the life of sacrifice and of following Christ, we each become foundation stones like Peter in the reign of God which is being built among us.

This week we explore what it means to be a disciple and to make the necessary sacrifices that help to bring God's dream to reality in our part of the world.

Sunday 15 January 2017

Reading: John 1:29-42

Reflection: There is so much going on in today's reading that we could spend the whole week looking at nothing else! There is John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus as the “Lamb of God”, the one who would be sacrificed for the sake of others. Then there is the calling of various disciples who, in their first encounters with Jesus,

discover his insight and wisdom. As a result, one of these men, Andrew, goes to find his brother, Simon, whom Jesus called Peter (the Rock). Each person in this account could be the focus of our meditations.

One thing is common to all of the people in this story. They all made tremendous sacrifices to respond to God's call. John the Baptist, who had lived very simply, and had taken his role as the forerunner very seriously, now had to step out of the limelight and make space for Jesus - which he did gladly. Jesus, of course, embraced the call to be the sacrificial Lamb of God, not just in his death, but in the compassionate, serving and generous way he lived. And the disciples left behind secure jobs, homes, families and comfort in order to participate in Jesus' mission.

We may also be called to step aside and allow others to take centre stage. Or, we may be called to support and share in someone else's ministry as they serve God's purpose. Or, we may be called to leave our comfort zones and give our lives for a specific task to which God calls us. Whatever form our discipleship takes, we are all called and we will all need to make sacrifices as we embrace the values, priorities and purposes of God.

What is God calling you to do today? What sacrifices might this require?

Practice for Today: When we hear God's call – and we will everyday, if we are listening – only one response will lead us and others to life: to dedicate ourselves to God's work. Today, renew your commitment to serve God in every facet of your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I hear your call, O God, and I commit to serve you with my whole life.

Monday 16 January 2017

Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Reflection: The Philip whose story is told in today's reading was not the apostle, but an ordinary believer who had been one of the appointed deacons to serve in the Jerusalem church (See Acts 6:5). When the persecution in Jerusalem became too intense, many of the believers, including Philip, scattered to other parts of the country.

Philip ended up in Jerusalem and through his preaching was used by God to start a revival in that region. Then he was moved by God's Spirit to the encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch.

We never learn this man's name, but we do know that he was a person of faith - he had been to Jerusalem to worship (even though, as a eunuch, he would not have been permitted entrance to the Temple). As he travelled home, he was reading from Isaiah, but did not understand the prophet's words. When Philip arrived, the eunuch was moved by his teaching and eagerly placed his faith in Jesus. After being baptised he returned on his way, and may have become the first person to bring the message of Jesus to Ethiopia. So many people were touched by the grace of Christ simply because of Philip's willing, obedient service!

We may not be called to be a Philip, but we can all touch those around us with God's grace. How can you do this today?

Practice for Today: Reaching people with the message of Jesus is less about the words we speak and more about the actions we perform. If all we do is tell people about Jesus, they probably won't listen for long. But, if they see Jesus in our loving service, they will often want to know what makes us so different. Today, allow Jesus' to shine through you as you serve others in simple acts of kindness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May my life speak of your grace and love, Jesus, so others may know the goodness I have found in you.

Tuesday 17 January 2017

Reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

Reflection: Isaiah is the Old Testament book that is most quoted by New Testament writers. Isaiah 53 is the famous song of the "Suffering Servant." It is one of the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah, which tell of God's chosen servant who, through tremendous suffering and persecution, brings life and salvation to God's people. The Gospel writers use today's reading to describe Jesus' sacrificial death.

Notice a few particular characteristics of Isaiah's servant. Although he was deeply connected with God from his youth, he was not particularly dynamic or attractive. The Servant was just an ordinary person, which should be comforting for us - we don't need to be

"special" to serve God's mission. Though his suffering was unjust, the people looked away and said nothing, allowing him to be persecuted instead of them. Injustice always thrives when people look away and refuse to speak out. In the same way, the massive injustices in our world will not be fixed if ordinary citizens continue to stay quiet. Simply by speaking out, using our vote, and living by a different set of values, we challenge and ultimately overcome injustice. This is a big part of our calling as disciples. Finally, the Servant is restored and praised when his suffering is over, because the truth is made known - that he suffered for the sake of others. God's promise of resurrection was true for Jesus, and it's true for us - when we give our lives for God's mission, we walk the road that leads to unquenchable life.

How does God's Servant challenge or inspire you today?

Practice for Today: We may not be called to actually suffer for the sake of others as Jesus was, or as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela were, but we are all called to stand against injustice and seek to bring life to all of God's children. There are lots of ways we can do this, but to wrestle with God in prayer for the sake of others is something we can all do. Fill today with sacrificial prayer for your world.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For all who suffer, are persecuted, or are victims of injustice, O God, I pray.

Wednesday 18 January 2017

Reading: Matthew 9:14-17

Reflection: Jesus' parable of the wine and the wineskins is often quoted whenever people want to do anything new or innovative that may meet with opposition. Sometimes this may be appropriate, but we must always be careful to place Jesus' words in context. The parable is told in response to a question about why Jesus' followers do not fast. Notice that Jesus never condemns fasting. He simply explains that for a time - while he (the Bridegroom) is with them - they do not need to fast. But, once he has gone, they will need the spiritual nourishment and growth that fasting brings. So, Jesus is not writing off ancient or traditional practices.

Jesus goes on to describe two scenarios of new and old things coming into conflict - clothing and wineskins. New cloth still has to mature and shrink before it can fit with old cloth, and new wine must still mature and ferment properly, which cannot happen in old skins without disastrous results. This is not saying that new is good and old is bad. Jesus is simply saying that the nature of the new is that it needs space to grow, experiment, "ferment" and mature. This was the case with his message and mission. But, there is still a place for old cloth and old wine which has been tested and has gone through the maturing process. Jesus' disciples still needed this maturation process, after which they would learn the need for tried and tested practices like fasting. The message for us here is to learn to make space for new ideas and innovations in which they can grow and mature without doing harm, while holding on to tried and tested practices and truths that still have value and bring life.

What new wine needs new wineskins in your life today? And what old wine can you still enjoy?

Practice for Today: What we praise, we value. Sometimes we speak positively of new things without really thinking, and sometimes we write off old things with similar thoughtlessness. And the opposite can also be true. But, if we are to make space for God's new work, while still retaining what is valuable of the tried and tested, we will need to learn to praise God for both old and new. Today, seek out new things to give praise for and remember old things that are also praiseworthy.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your grace and love that comes to me in new ways and in old, I praise you, O God.

Thursday 19 January 2017

Reading: Psalm 27:1-6

Reflection: On Sunday one of the readings is from Isaiah and speaks of God's light shining on those who feel that their world is in darkness. Today the Psalmist expresses a similar comforting sentiment. Though he was threatened, he found his security in the knowledge that God's light could not be extinguished by even the deepest darkness. Then, he offered a prayer that may be surprising in the face of his difficult circumstances - the one thing he desired

above all else was to live in God's presence, in an intimate relationship with God. It was this relationship that enabled him to feel secure even in the face of great persecution and suffering. It was this relationship that gave him the courage and confidence to stand tall and face his trials in God's strength.

So many people across the world have begun to question why we need to worship with others in church services. When all that happens is that a band or choir presents a few songs (with which the people may or may not be able to join in) and a preacher offers a few self-help tips, then worship has very little value. But, when we experience worship as the Psalmist did - as an encounter with God that transforms us, strengthens us, and gives us the tools to navigate life's turmoil - then the weekly worship gathering is the most important activity of our lives. And this is exactly what it is meant to be, if we will just be faithful in gathering and in opening our hearts to God's transforming presence.

What would your life look like if you sought encounter with God above all else? How can you make it your heart's desire today?

Practice for Today: The thing that made the Psalmist aware of his need for God's presence was his memory of how God had sheltered and strengthened him in the past. In the same way, when we remember times of encounter with God, our desire to be in God's presence is ignited even more. Thanksgiving helps us to remember our past experiences of God, and nurtures our longing for more of God. Spend today in thanksgiving for God's abiding presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your presence that shelters and transforms me, O God, I give thanks.

Friday 20 January 2017

Reading: 1 Samuel 9:27-10:8

Reflection: You would think that when a new king is appointed, who has no experience of such leadership, that the first thing God's prophet would do would be to train him in disciplines like statecraft and military strategy. But this is not what Samuel did when he anointed Saul as Israel's first king. Instead he called Saul to engage in a number of strange activities that would show him that Samuel's

words about God's call were true, but that would also lead him into a deeper and more intimate relationship with God. He would be greeted by men going to worship who would offer him two of their sacrificial loaves of bread - seemingly so that he could join in their worship. Then he would be drawn into the worship of a group of prophets and find himself prophesying as well - which was a sign of his encounter with God, and the way God's Spirit would transform him. Finally, he was to wait for Samuel to join him in Gilgal where they would offer sacrifices together in worship. Saul's training for leadership consisted of three transforming acts of worship!

If we are to experience God's light breaking into the darkness of our lives and of our world, we must open ourselves to God's presence and Spirit. Nothing opens us to God more than the act of worship. Worship is far more than just singing a few songs. It is placing our lives under the influence of God. It is allowing the light of God's presence and love to fill every part of us so that we reflect that light into the world. It is returning constantly to worship so that we can be changed a little more each time into the likeness of Christ. When we worship like this, we discover that we carry the light of God into whatever darkness we may have to face.

How can you open yourself to God's light a little more today?

Practice for Today: Samuel's instructions to Saul were designed to open him to the presence and power of God's transforming Spirit. The practice of invocation is designed to do the same for us. When we invite God's Spirit to fill us, we are also asking God to change us into reflections of God's light. Go through today inviting God's Spirit to fill and transform you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Fill me with your light, Holy Spirit, that I may shine it into my world.

Saturday 21 January 2017

Reading: Luke 5:27-32

Reflection: When Matthew's Gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the writer uses an image from the book of Isaiah, of God's light coming to those in darkness. If there was anyone who lived in darkness, it was Levi the tax collector. Tax collectors were

traitors to their own people; outcasts who learned to make their living by dishonest manipulation of their responsibility to the hated Roman Empire. We can only imagine what had happened in Levi's life to make him choose this work, but when Jesus appeared, he must have seen the light of God's grace and love, and so he left everything and joined Jesus' followers. Later, when he hosted Jesus at a banquet in his home, many of Levi's dubious friends came, probably because they also saw the light in Jesus. Strangely, the religious leaders, whom we would expect to be the first to recognise the way God's light was shining through Christ, were confused and unable to grasp what God was doing.

If we are to know the light of God in our own lives, we will best experience it as we share it with others - especially those who live in darkness. It doesn't matter whether the darkness is there because of a person's own sinfulness, or through the effects of others' sin, we are called, like Jesus, to shine God's light for all to see, and to invite all people to experience the liberation and healing of God's grace and love. The moment we allow ourselves to believe that anyone is beyond God's grace, we have become more like the religious leaders than like Jesus, the light of the world.

Who needs you to shine God's light into their darkness today?

Practice for Today: It is amazing how powerful words can be, especially when they are accompanied by the right actions. In Levi's case, it was Jesus' simple invitation, along with his acceptance and grace, that attracted him to follow Jesus, and leave behind his broken, corrupt life. Today, seek to speak words of grace and love, and to act in welcoming ways with everyone you meet, and let your words and deeds of blessing shine God's light.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I speak and act in ways that bless others, Jesus, may your light shine into this world's darkness.

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