

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
22 – 28 January 2017

Thought for the Week:

The Scriptures often use images of light and darkness to describe the impact of God's Reign on the world. The works of evil, often done in secret with much deception and obscuring of the truth, are described as darkness which makes it harder for us to see and navigate the world effectively, and which brings much pain and struggle into our lives. The Reign of God, however, is described as a light which illuminates our lives, directing and warming us, and protecting us from the effects of darkness. These images are also used by the Gospel writers to describe the ministry of Jesus, which is why Jesus referred to himself as the light of the world.

As we seek to follow Jesus, we are called to embrace God's light and to turn away from the darkness. This means that we must learn to become people of truth, integrity, faithfulness, grace and justice who oppose dishonesty, expediency, insincerity and injustice. This is why Jesus also called his followers the light of the world. To fight the darkness we need only to let our little light shine, as the old Sunday School song said.

This week we explore living in, and being reflections of, God's light.

Sunday 22 January 2017

Reading: Matthew 4:12-2

Reflection: When Jesus began his ministry, the writer of Matthew's Gospel used a prophecy from Isaiah to describe it: "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." The coming of Jesus, and the establishment of God's Reign was like a light of liberation, forgiveness and life to a people who were oppressed, condemned and dying. The Gospel narrates two ways that this light of Christ was revealed. Firstly, Jesus created a new people of God - a new Israel - to be custodians and carriers of God's grace and life to the world. Then, secondly, Jesus healed and delivered those who were suffering from illness or demonic oppression. By doing this, Jesus

did not just speak about God's light, but showed what it looked like and how it could bring new life to those who embraced it.

As we seek to follow Jesus and be little lights to the world, like the first disciples, we will find that we need to connect with others. It is only in community, as we support, encourage and challenge one another, that we can grow better and better at reflecting Christ's light. And as we live like Jesus, we too will bring healing and freedom to others. It may not be as dramatic as some of the Gospel stories, but the healing we bring will be just as significant for those who experience a new wholeness in Jesus.

How can you embrace Christ's light a little more today?

Practice for Today: One of the best ways to open our hearts and lives to God's light is through the practice of praise. As we proclaim and celebrate all that God is and does, God's presence fills our lives with light, and shines through us to pierce the darkness in our world. Allow praise to fill you with light today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise and celebrate your light that pierces the darkness, O God.

Monday 23 January 2017

Reading: Judges 6:11-24

Reflection: After years of being attacked and robbed by the nations surrounding Israel, God's people finally turned back to God and prayed for help. But, characteristically, God did not choose a mighty warrior, a wealthy ruler, or a famous diplomat to bring healing to God's people. Rather, God chose an insignificant young man from an insignificant family. Naturally, Gideon struggled to believe that God really intended him to be the liberator of Israel, and so he asked God (many times) for a sign to confirm the call. Graciously, God gave him the signs he asked for, and Gideon went on to free God's people from their enemies.

Like Gideon, we may feel that we have nothing to offer God's mission. We may have any number of good reasons why we couldn't possibly be the people God would call to participate in God's work, but if we allow God to reveal God's presence and light to us, we will soon realise that God can use any instrument God

chooses, and that it is God's light, not ours, that is important. Then, we can rest in the knowledge that only have to allow God's light to shine through us in order to touch others with God's grace and love.

How can you be a reflection of God's light to your friends and neighbours today?

Practice for Today: The key to reflecting God's light is to stay as constantly aware of God's presence and light in our own lives as we can. The practice of invocation, which consciously opens us to God's spirit, is a good way to nurture this mindfulness. Go through today with a prayer of invocation in your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Keep me mindful of your presence and light in my life, O Spirit of God.

Tuesday 24 January 2017

Reading: Philippians 2:12-22

Reflection: It may be tempting to think of our task as "lights of the world" as something difficult and dramatic that can only be done by some specially gifted people. But, the apostle Paul was very clear that all Christians are called to shine God's light. The way he describes how we do this is neither difficult nor dramatic, but simple and natural. We are to reject complaining and arguing. We are to live clean and innocent lives - avoiding the cynicism, crookedness and brokenness of the world around us. And we are to be faithful, both in following God's word and in serving others. As we do these little things each day, God's light shines through us.

Paul's companion, Timothy, is a good example of living in the light. While others were selfish and self-interested, Timothy was caring, compassionate and selfless. He worked alongside Paul, supporting him and acting as his messenger while he was in prison. Paul's ministry would definitely not have been nearly as effective if not for such faithful friends.

How can you be a Timothy to someone today, sharing God's light in caring service?

Practice for Today: The practice of serving others can often be summed up in one simple word: kindness. When we treat everyone

with kindness, we bring joy, wholeness, acceptance and strength into their lives. While kindness costs us very little, the blessing it brings to those around us is valuable beyond measure. Today, serve your friends and neighbours through simple acts of kindness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have served me with great kindness, Jesus, so I serve those around me.

Wednesday 25 January 2017

Reading: Psalm 27:7-14

Reflection: The verses that precede today's reading in Psalm 15 express great confidence in God's presence and grace, and a deep longing in the Psalmist's heart for intimate connection with God. It is this sense of God's nearness and love that frees the Psalmist to offer the prayers we read today. Having experienced God's closeness, the writer prays that God will not leave, but will hold him close. He is deeply aware of those that would seek to do him harm, and, as a protection, asks for God's guidance and direction in the ways of life. Notice how, as the prayer progresses, the Psalmist grows in confidence, finally proclaiming his assurance that he will experience God's goodness in spite of his struggles. Finally, he exhorts himself to wait patiently for God, because this is what will keep his connection with God strong.

There can be no lasting light in our lives, and no possibility of being a light to the world, without a deep, intimate connection with God. It is easy to observe rituals and pray prayers, but when we experience God's presence, we discover a strength and confidence that not only sustains us, but that enables us to shine through even the most difficult circumstances. It is also God's presence that guides us in the ways of life - the best way to live if we are to flourish. But, the key is the practice of waiting patiently on God. It is not that God is reluctant or slow to come to us. There is nothing that can separate us from God's presence. Rather, it is that we need patient waiting to still our souls enough to recognise God's presence.

How can you nurture an attitude of patient waiting on God today?

Practice for Today: The practice of stillness (sometimes called silence) has always been taught by spiritual teachers as a way to

encounter God and learn to know God's presence. This is not about passively sitting in a noiseless environment. Rather, it is about intentionally opening ourselves to God's Spirit, and turning away from distractions so that we can experience God. Make some time for stillness today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I wait patiently for you, O God.

Thursday 26 January 2017

Reading: Deuteronomy 16:18-20

Reflection: Before he died, Moses gathered the people of Israel on the borders of the Promised Land and reminded them of God's law. This great prophet knew that God's people could only fulfil their calling to be a light to the nations if they stayed connected to God, and if they followed God's ways. Although reading the Old Testament laws can be overwhelming because of what seems like great complexity, all the laws boil down to a few simple principles. In today's short reading the importance of integrity is highlighted, not just for leaders, but for all the people. Giving and receiving bribes can never lead to justice and peace. Judging others with bias never resolves issues of justice well, but fairness does. Notice how the writer of Deuteronomy connects a life of justice with the ability of God's people to live in God's land. Even if they inhabited the geographical area that God had given them, the people would not be living in God's land if they failed to follow God's ways of integrity and fairness. And they certainly would not be able to reflect God's light to the world.

It is always tempting to favour those who are like us, or from whom we can receive reciprocal benefits. It is always tempting to use whatever means we can - including small acts of bribery, if necessary - to make our lives easier and more streamlined. But, when we do this, we participate in creating a world of imbalance and injustice which brings suffering on everyone. It may seem to help us in the short term, but in the end, it just creates more pain and struggle. This is why integrity is such a fundamental part of all of God's law to the Israelites, and Jesus' teaching to his followers.

How can you practice integrity and fairness a little more intentionally today?

Practice for Today: It can be tough to live with radical fairness, even for those who have high standards of integrity. But, when we practice praying for all people - both those we love and those with whom we struggle - we learn to be fair to everyone regardless of our relationship with them. Today, spend some time praying especially for those with whom you disagree, and whom you struggle to love.

Breath-Prayer for Today: May your fairness and justice extend through me to everyone I encounter, O God.

Friday 27 January 2017

Reading: Psalm 15

Reflection: As our reflection on living as "the light of the world" continues, it might be helpful to note that Sunday's Gospel reading is the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, known as the Beatitudes. This simple, poetic teaching of Jesus powerfully expresses what it means to live in God's light. Today's Psalm prepares us for that reflection very well. When the Psalmist speaks of worship in God's sanctuary, this is really about being intimately connected with God. The Psalm seeks to answer the question of who is able to find this deep relationship with God. This is not to say that we connect with God through certain "good works". It is always God's grace that opens the door to relationship with God. However, like every relationship, intimacy with God changes us, and is revealed in certain clear characteristics. So, in this list, the Psalmist shows how we can recognise those who are in an intimate relationship with God.

Those who worship truly are recognised by their commitment to do what is right, and to speak truly and with integrity. They refuse to participate in gossip, and they avoid anything that brings harm to, or speaks evil of, others. They keep their promises even when it is painful to do so, and they are generous and selfless. Finally, because of their integrity, they have nothing to do with corruption in any form. These are the ones who "stand firm" because when we live like this we are able to navigate the world more effectively, and our actions and attitudes bring life to others and to ourselves.

How can you nurture a relationship with God that transforms you into this kind of person?

Practice for Today: The practice of worship - and all the practices that are included in it - are not just about expressing love for God. They are about being shaped into those who reflect the light of God to the world. Our songs, prayers, Scriptures, symbols and rituals teach us the habits of Christlike living. Today spend time in worship - not just singing - and allow this time to shape you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I worship you, O God, transform me into a carrier of your light.

Saturday 28 January 2017

Reading: John 13:31-35

Reflection: As Jesus prepared for his death, he took one last opportunity to teach his disciples. Chapters 13 to 17 of John's Gospel are like an extended "last words" of Jesus, and so, if we want to get to the heart of Jesus mission and message, these chapters are a good place to start. Chapter 13 begins with a summary of what is to follow, but it is not expressed in words so much as in the action of washing the feet of the disciples. Notice that Jesus even washed the feet of Judas! Then, after Judas had left to betray him, Jesus drove his teaching home with the only commandment he ever gave his followers: "Love one another as I have loved you". It is our love, Jesus taught, that would show the world that we are his followers - not our purity, or our right doctrine, or our separation from "the world".

There is no question that God's light shines most brightly through those who have learned to love well. If you think about the people in history who have been remembered with the greatest respect, it is usually those who have been known for their love, expressed in grace, forgiveness, justice, and inclusivity. If we seek to live the Jesus way, and shine the light of God into the world, we will have to set our hearts on learning to be the best lovers we can.

How can you commit a little more to loving others as best you can today?

Practice for Today: If we are to learn to love as Jesus did, we will need to study how Jesus lived and loved. This is why the Scriptures, and especially the Gospels, are such a gift - they give us a window

into Jesus' life. Today, spend some time reading one of the Gospels and let Jesus teach you to be a better lover.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me to love as you have loved me, Jesus.

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