

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
26 February - 04 March 2017

Thought for the Week:

Jesus' ministry is touched at two significant moments by God's glory and God's voice. The first was at his baptism as he started his ministry. The second is here at the transfiguration. In the first three Gospels this visitation of God comes as Jesus turns toward Jerusalem and his coming sacrifice, and it serves to affirm and strengthen him for the ordeal ahead. But it was also an important moment of preparation and reassurance for the disciples. It was natural, as they watched Jesus die, that they should have doubted his claims. However, even though the Gospels do reflect these doubts, it may have been the memory of this event that kept them from completely abandoning the community Jesus had started and the teachings he had given. Perhaps it was this memory that helped Peter stay present enough to be restored after he denied Jesus.

For we who seek to follow Jesus today, the transfiguration is an important moment in the Church Calendar. The season after the Epiphany, through which we have just journeyed, is "book-ended" by the two moments when Jesus sees God's glory and hears God's voice. This means that we have had a wonderful opportunity to see God's glory revealed in Jesus. It also means that, as we turn to the challenging and convicting season of Lent, we can hold in our hearts the memory of God's affirmation of Jesus, and allow this to sustain us as we embrace the transforming disciplines of this season.

This week as we meditate on the transfiguration and begin the Lenten journey, we open ourselves to God's glory and affirmation, and prepare ourselves for the journey of repentance that leads us to the cross and beyond.

Sunday 26 February 2017

Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

Reflection: For Matthew's Jewish readers the idea of a dying Messiah was absurd, so he had to work hard to convince them that

Jesus was indeed the Promised One. The transfiguration was an important revealer of God's affirmation of Jesus, and of God's glory revealed in Jesus. It shows that the cross was not God's curse, but was an integral part of God's plan for the Messiah. The appearance of Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, reveal that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament plan of salvation. And Jesus' final words instructing his disciples to tell no one until he had been resurrected demonstrate that Jesus' sense of purpose included his sacrificial death.

As we reflect on this account, our task is to recognise the way God's glory is revealed in Jesus – not just in his miracles and resurrection, but also in his sacrificial death. We can take comfort in God's affirmation of Jesus because it reveals something of God's heart. We all face times of struggle, suffering and sacrifice, and it is tempting in those times to feel that God has either abandoned us or is punishing us. But, God's promise to us is the same as God's promise to Jesus – in our suffering God's glory can be revealed, and we can experience a deeper sense of God's presence and affirmation. We only need to recognise that God is with us, and that in, our suffering, God still seeks to reveal God's glory through us.

How can you reflect God's glory to those around you, especially when you experience times of trial?

Practice for Today: One of the most difficult, but important, choices we can make as followers of Jesus, is to nurture our awareness of God's presence and glory in every moment of our lives. This is especially necessary when we face times of struggle. The practice of invocation is exactly what we need to grow our awareness of God's Spirit. Today, whether you are celebrating or grieving, invite God's Spirit to work within you and to remind you of God's presence.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In my joy and in my sorrow, Holy Spirit, remind me of your grace and glory, I pray.

Monday 27 February 2017

Reading: Acts 7:30-34

Reflection: The first Christian martyr, Stephen, gave a pretty long sermon when he was asked to respond to his accusers. Beginning

with his people's earliest history, he traced the way God had revealed God's Self to Israel through the ages in various ways up until the primary revelation of God in Jesus. This message resonates strongly with the transfiguration theme of this week in which God's glory is seen to be revealed through Jesus, and God's voice calls us to listen to Jesus' words. It is important that we pay attention to these moments of new insight into God's presence and purposes, because they lead us more deeply into God's ways and God's life.

Today's reading highlights the moment where Stephen reminds his hearers of God's appearance to Moses. Notice how God used the surprising sight of a burning bush to catch Moses' attention. Then, God revealed who God was, and showed Moses God's love and concern for God's people. It was out of this new encounter with God that Moses discovered that he was called to be more than he had realised. Every follower of Jesus will experience similar encounters with God at some point. We may not see a burning bush or hear a loud voice, but we will experience new insights into God's presence and purpose and be changed. And usually the change involves some sort of call to carry God's liberating love to those around us.

How is God calling you to reveal God's liberating love to your friends, family, colleagues and neighbours today?

Practice for Today: Every Christian is called to proclaim the saving message of the Gospel. This simply means that we are to recognise God's presence in our own lives and live in ways that cooperate with God's saving purposes. Then others will be touched by God's love and be liberated – even if only in some small way. Today, allow your life to proclaim God's glory and grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I recognise your presence and glory in my life, O God, so I reflect your glory and grace to others.

Tuesday 28 February 2017

Reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18

Reflection: God used both Elijah and Jesus in amazing ways, and both suffered deeply. Yet their encounters with God were very different. After the showdown with Baal's prophets in which Elijah

showed that Baal was a powerless idol, you would expect him to have been elated. But he had received a death threat from the queen and ran into the wilderness depressed, alone, and defeated. Then God revealed God's Self to him – not in glorious manifestations, but in a gentle whisper – and this empowered him for ministry again. In Jesus' case, the encounter came when things were going well in his ministry. But, he knew he had to face a sacrificial death, and so God prepared him for the coming ordeal. This encounter was glorious and powerful, with bright light, loud voices, and the appearance of two great heroes from the past. And it seemed to empower Jesus to face the road he was called to follow.

It's tempting, when we experience God in a powerful or significant way, to think that everyone should have the same experience. Then, when others encounter God in different ways, or through different expressions of worship and devotion, we easily judge them as inadequate, or as not open to God's move. Yet, the Scriptures reveal that God sometimes comes to us in dramatic manifestations, and sometimes in quiet, gentle whispers. Neither is better than the other. They are just different, and are tailored to our specific needs. The key is to learn to be open to God's gracious visitations whenever and however they may come, and to receive whatever strength and inspiration we need.

How can you open yourself to encounter God again today?

Practice for Today: In the lives of both Jesus and Elijah it was the discipline of prayer that kept them available to receive God's visitations. When we make prayer – both speaking and listening – a regular feature of our lives, we remain open to any divine encounters that may come. Today, allow your prayer life to prepare you to meet with God throughout the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Prepare my heart, O God, that I may be ready when you choose to reveal yourself to me.

Ash Wednesday 01 March 2017

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Reflection: Today we begin the season of Lent, and, once again, we embrace the three disciplines of fasting, giving (including giving

of ourselves in service), and prayer. The Lenten journey is a time of learning, in a more focussed way, the habits of Christlikeness, so that we can live them all year long. If you haven't yet decided how you will practice fasting, giving, and prayer through the next forty days, you may want to take a moment today to consider it.

Lent reminds us that following Jesus is not about health, wealth and happiness. There are far more precious values than these to live by! Paul's is an example of how following Christ can lead us into abundant life, even though it included great suffering, hard work, and sacrificial service. After proclaiming Christ's gift of salvation, Paul described how he had given his life in service of this gift. He did this not to boast, but to reveal how valuable God's gift of life really is. He and his companions tried to minister to as many people as possible. They endured troubles and hardships. They were beaten and imprisoned. They often lacked both food and sleep, yet they remained faithful and pure. They nurtured the fruits of patience, kindness, and love, and they sought to treat all people with respect, no matter how they were treated in return. And in all of this, they knew the presence of God's Spirit and they enjoyed the fullness of God's life. What an example for us to follow!

How can you learn to live in this vibrant, selfless way this Lent? How can you start today?

Practice for Today: On Ash Wednesday it is always good to reflect in more depth on the three basic disciplines of this season – which are the three basic disciplines of the Christ-following life: fasting, giving and prayer. Today, make some time to reflect on how you can be more intentional in your practice of these habits, and do one thing to begin to practice them with more mindfulness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me, Jesus, to understand that abundant life is found in following your way of simplicity, generosity, and humble prayer.

Thursday 02 March 2017

Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Reflection: Right from the first verses of the letter to the Romans Paul reveals that Jesus was more than just a person on a mission,

and he was certainly not just a Jewish Messiah. The message and mission of Jesus, the unique incarnation of God in this one human being, was promised from the earliest of times, and, though Jesus was born into David's line, he came to all nations. That's why Paul is so confident to proclaim that he and his companions have been called by God to lead Gentiles to Jesus. This message is for them (and us) too.

Notice though what response Paul expects to his message about Jesus. His goal is that people should respond in three ways. They should believe; they should obey; and they should bring glory to God's name. These are really three parts of one thing. If you don't obey, you haven't really believed, and if you aren't bringing glory to God, you're not obeying. But, if you don't believe, you won't be able to obey or reflect God's glory. So, believing, obeying, and bringing glory to God are inseparable – as they were in the life of Jesus. When these three work together we are able, like Jesus, to overcome any temptation – as we will see on Sunday.

How can you strengthen your believing, obeying, and glorifying of God today?

Practice for Today: It's comforting to remember that faith is a lifelong journey. We don't have to get it all together in an instant. Rather, as we commit each day to God in loving devotion, we believe a little more firmly, we obey a little more eagerly, and we glorify God a little more clearly. Today, renew your commitment to God and allow these three features of faith to grow within you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I commit myself to you again, O God, I seek to believe, obey and glorify you more.

Friday 03 March 2017

Reading: Jonah 4:1-11

Reflection: It is easy to miss how radical the story of Jonah was for its time. The prophet famously ran away from God's call, causing a storm to hit the ship he was travelling on. As a result, he was thrown overboard, swallowed by a great fish and coughed up on the shores of Nineveh. Then, realising he could not avoid it, Jonah preached one of the most successful sermons in history – it caused the whole

city to turn to God in repentance! But, instead of celebrating his success and the deliverance of all these people, Jonah was angry that God had not brought about the promised judgement. Jonah had no compassion on these people. He wanted to be right, and so the judgement had to come. This is how most of us feel about those we consider to be our enemies. Sometimes, we even choose this course with those we love – we would rather be right than loving.

But, God had a lesson for Jonah, and for the readers of this book. A plant grew up to shelter Jonah, and then was destroyed by a worm. Jonah grew extremely angry about this, not out of compassion for the plant, but out of a selfish concern for his own comfort. Nevertheless God used this to explain God's concern for the Ninevites. It can be really hard for us to acknowledge that God loves our enemies as much as God loves us, but this is the message of the book of Jonah. We need to face our temptations and brokenness with the strength and wisdom of Jesus, not with Jonah's selfish, self-righteous callousness. We need to refuse to put ourselves above others, no matter who they are or what they've done.

How can you celebrate God's love for your enemies today? And how can you face your own darkness as you do so?

Practice for Today: One of Jonah's problems was a complete lack of self-knowledge. While he was eager to see judgement fall on the people of Nineveh, he was oblivious to his own rebelliousness, lack of compassion, and self-righteousness. If had been willing to see these broken parts of himself, he probably would have felt much more compassionate toward the Ninevites. This is why we need confession. It frees us from our own sin and opens our hearts to be more loving to others. Allow confession to soften your heart today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I acknowledge my brokenness, O God, and ask you to soften my heart toward you and others.

Saturday 04 March 2017

Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

Reflection: The challenge of any religion is that it easily becomes a system of rules and rituals that have little impact on how we live. In spite of the transforming impact of Jesus' message, the community

that calls itself by his name has often become just another religion. Even as we read the account of Jesus' temptation tomorrow, we may fail to recognise that when we bow to our own temptations, we turn our faith into a dry and empty religion. Today's reading helps us to identify the difference between empty religion and true faith.

Scholars believe that in the time of this prophecy, the people of Israel had returned from exile and were seeking to rebuild their nation. However, they had fallen back into the unjust ways that had brought about the exile in the first place. They were practicing the rituals and rules of their religion, but it was simply as a way to try and impress God. The life change that God sought was not happening, and the wealthy were still exploiting the poor, ignoring the needy, and pursuing the immediate gratification of their own pleasures. This is why God calls them back to the essence of their faith – the true fasting of justice and compassion for all, and the true Sabbath of realigning their lives with God's values and purposes. Every follower of Christ needs to hear this call on a regular basis. It is only as our faith becomes the defining framework of our lives that it has any value for us, for God, or for the world.

How can you ensure that the practices of your faith connect with your heart and life and change you into being more Christlike today?

Practice for Today: One of the most transforming practices of our faith is praise. When we express our awe and wonder at God's goodness, glory, and grace, we open ourselves to be changed, and we align our lives with the God we worship. Today, allow your praises to be more than just words, and let them draw you into a true, transforming encounter with God.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I praise you, O God, I open my life to be changed a little more into your likeness.

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