

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

14 - 20 May 2017

Thought for the Week:

One of Jesus' most radical claims was that he revealed God to us. We cannot be followers of Jesus without wholeheartedly accepting that this claim was, and is, true. In this season of resurrection, the fact that death could not quench the life of Jesus is evidence that what he said about himself was trustworthy and to be believed. This means that, if we want to discover what God is like, we only have to look at Jesus, and we will learn all we need to know.

But, there is another side to this important truth. If Jesus reveals God to us, any beliefs we hold about God that are not consistent with the values, character and purposes of Jesus, are incorrect. If we see Jesus forgiving and including, but we believe that God is exclusive and judgemental, we have a contradictory view of God. If we see Jesus refusing to use violence to manifest God's Reign, but we believe that God punishes people through natural disasters, accidents or disease, we have a contradictory view of God. Not only does Jesus claim that he reveals God to us, he is also saying that God is like Jesus. This is the heart of our faith.

This week we meditate on how God is revealed in Jesus, and on the kind of God that Jesus shows us.

Sunday 14 May 2017

Reading: John 14:1-14

Reflection: When the disciples asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus was clear that God is revealed and encountered in him. This means that, in order to get to "where Jesus was going" - the place where God's will and presence are known and experienced completely - we only need to be in deep and intimate relationship with Jesus. In John 17 Jesus confirms this when he prays that eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom God sent. The word to "know" here refers to intimate connection.

In the middle of this teaching Jesus speaks some well known words that have been used to justify Christian arrogance and exclusivity for centuries. He says that he is "the way, the truth, and the life" and that "no one comes to God except through him". This is actually one of the most inclusive statements in the Bible! Jesus is saying that, however we may seek for God, in the end we will discover that he has been working in us all along. Jesus is not trying to keep some people out. He's welcoming all God-seekers in. Then he goes on to say that anything we ask in his name - which means in accordance with his values and purposes - will be done. And, when God's people are praying in this Christ-centred, inclusive way, the impact will be greater even than that of Jesus' own life!

How can you embrace Christ's inclusive love today? And how you can allow this love to shape your prayers in Jesus' name?

Practice for Today: Jesus' name is not a magic word that gives us whatever we desire. It is a touchstone that shapes our values, our purpose, our behaviour, and our desires. When we pray in Jesus' name, we are submitting ourselves to Jesus' way, and seeking to pray in alignment with Jesus' mission. Then, our prayers are done, because they are the same as Jesus' own prayers. Furthermore, when we pray like this, we begin to live in alignment with what we pray, and our lives begin to touch others with Christ's inclusive love. Today, pray in Jesus' name like this.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray in your name, Jesus, so my prayers and my life align with your values and purposes.

Monday 15 May 2017

Reading: Psalm 102:1-17

Reflection: The Psalmists were no strangers to suffering, and they were shameless in bringing their cries and complaints to God. But, today's Psalm has an interesting twist. It begins in a very personal way, with the writer asking God to deliver him from distress and from the enemies that mock him. But, then he expands his vision to the city of Jerusalem and to all of God's people. He celebrates God as the monarch who is enthroned in glory, and who will rebuild Jerusalem and hear the prayers of the destitute. Even in his personal struggle this writer keeps the pain of others in his heart,

and this opens him to the hope that is found in God's presence.

Many of those who have experienced great difficulty in this life testify that, when they get absorbed in their own pain, they feel their suffering more, but when they open their hearts and begin to consider the pain of others, their own suffering somehow diminishes. It is when we shift our focus outward that we become aware of how God's life is at work within us and in our world. And, as we begin to pray for others, and seek to serve them in some small way, our own pain loses its power, and we begin to see hope and life again.

Who needs you to stand with them in suffering today - no matter what your own circumstances may be?

Practice for Today: Sometimes the best way to serve others is just to be with them. Isolation makes our suffering worse, but when we have someone who will stay with us in the pain, we feel safe enough to grieve. But, we also find hope, because when we don't have faith, we have others who can believe for us. Today stand with someone else in their pain and be a source of hope to them.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I stand with those who are hurting, O God, let me bring them hope.

Tuesday 16 May 201

Reading: Proverbs 3:5-12

Reflection: Along with the constant call not to fear, the Bible constantly encourages us to trust in God. Today we read a very practical description of what trust is: it is not depending on our own understanding. It's not that our intellects are unimportant. It simply means that we should hold our own ideas lightly, and be open to the new, surprising, unexpected, serendipitous insights of God's Spirit. But, trusting in God also means seeking God's will and following God's ways. It means honouring God with whatever wealth we may have and giving God our best. Finally, it means embracing God's discipline, and correction as the gift of a loving parent.

When we seek to trust God in these ways, our faith permeates every part of our lives. Unless our trust in God shows in how we live, we're deceiving ourselves. But, when our faith in God's ways directs how we treat others, how we work and play, how we spend our money,

how we vote and how we care for our part of the planet, we have truly begun to be believers in Jesus. This is because our faith has shown us what God is really like, and we come to know God as the compassionate, loving parent that Jesus revealed. But, it is also because we have come to know that God's ways are trustworthy, and that they really do lead us, and those around us, to life.

How can you express your trust in God in a practical way today?

Practice for Today: The act of giving is one of the simplest and most liberating ways to express our trust in God. When we give we express our faith that God can supply what we need, and we demonstrate our belief that Jesus' way of generosity and love is truly the best way to live. Today use every opportunity to give of your time, talents or treasures to those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I trust in your ways and your love, O God, and so I freely give of myself to others for your sake.

Wednesday 17 May 2017

Reading: Proverbs 3:13-18

Reflection: Following on from yesterday's call to trust in God's ways, the book of Proverbs now calls us to seek wisdom. In Proverbs, wisdom is associated with God, and is described as being present at creation. It is a source of life and a manifestation of God - much like the Gospel of John's "Logos". These few verses of Proverbs describe wisdom as the most valuable and desirable thing we can seek. It is better than precious metals and stones. It guides us down paths that lead us to joy and delight. It offers us life and brings great satisfaction. It is a "tree of life" that should be clung to.

The focus here is God's wisdom. But, there are other "wisdoms" that aren't very wise at all. There is a kind of wisdom that enables us to navigate the systems and values of human society so that we "win the game" in human terms. But, while this wisdom is prevalent in our world, it has not brought solutions to the big crises of poverty, war, and climate change. This is because human wisdom is limited, tends to be individualistic or tribalistic, and is driven by the desire for pleasure, power and possessions. But, the wisdom that the writer of Proverbs describes is very different from this. It is expressed in care

for and service of others. It is rooted in love for God and neighbour, and it embraces the disciplines of simplicity, service and sacrifice that Jesus proclaimed. This is true wisdom and it is indeed a tree of life, if we have the courage to embrace and cling to it.

How can you cling to God's wisdom today?

Practice for Today: Today's reading is a song of praise in which wisdom is celebrated and honoured. When we praise something like this, we nurture the desire for it in our hearts, and we focus our minds and energies on it. This is why praise is such a powerful and important discipline - it captures our hearts with the desire for God's ways. Today allow this song in praise of wisdom to echo in your heart and words throughout the day.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise your wisdom, O God, for it is more valuable than riches, and it leads me to life.

Thursday 18 May 2017

Reading: Acts 27:1-12

Reflection: In an age where sea travel was treacherous and unpredictable, Paul was being transported as a prisoner to Rome. Because of an extended run of extremely bad weather, the ship had not reached its destination before sailing became too dangerous, yet the captain wanted to continue the journey in spite of the risk. Financially, there would be big losses if the cargo did not arrive at its destination in time. And it would be much better to spend the winter in a sheltered port rather than one exposed to the elements. But, Paul warned against traveling in such bad conditions. He wanted the decision makers to put safety and care for human lives first. However, Paul was just a prisoner, and so he was ignored. Yet everything Paul predicted happened. They ended up being shipwrecked, although fortunately that no lives were lost. However, though it all Paul ended up being deeply respected and honoured, and he had an amazing opportunity to touch people with God's healing and saving grace.

It is all too easy to get caught up in human wisdom, but when we are driven by the need to protect our financial concerns, or to save face, we may become careless or take unnecessary risks. This doesn't

mean that we shouldn't ever take risks - even Paul risked his life when it was needed - but that we should ensure our decisions are driven by God's values, rather than our own self-interest. When we listen to the guiding voice of God's Spirit, we may find ourselves choosing caution when others are taking risks, and we may find ourselves taking risks when others are being self-protective. But, in every situation, as was the case with Paul, our decisions will be for the common good, not just for our own selfish benefit.

Are any of your decisions today based on your own self-centred wisdom? How can you ensure that your decisions are rooted more deeply in God's ways of caring for others as well as yourself?

Practice for Today: If we are honest we will admit that a concern for the common good does not always come naturally to us. And even when it does, we can't always know what the best decisions are to benefit the most people. This is why we need the wisdom and guidance of God's Spirit, and why we need to make the practice of invoking the Spirit's presence a habit. Today, invite God's Spirit to lead you through each moment, and every decision you face.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, and guide me into your compassionate wisdom.

Friday 19 May 2017

Reading: Psalm 66:8-20

Reflection: Today's reading makes a few statements that are difficult to reconcile with what Jesus revealed about God. Verse 11 speaks of God laying the burden of slavery on God's people, and verse 18 seems to indicate that God does not listen to the prayers of those who have unconfessed sin in their hearts. These verses reflect both the worldview of the writer, and the way many of us experience life. It often feels like God is punishing us, or refusing to hear us because we've stepped out of line. But, Jesus revealed that this is not how God operates. God always listens to the cry of human hearts - even sinners. And God never enslaves anyone. On the contrary, God always seeks to liberate us. Nevertheless, this Psalm give an accurate picture of what it feels like to suffer.

But, there's another truth at work in this Psalm - the praise of God's

goodness. Today's section begins with a statement of great affirmation and trust - "our lives are in God's hands". Then, the Psalmist continues to express faith as he proclaims that God heard his prayer, and did not withdraw God's unfailing love. Of course, if there was any chance that God's love could be withdrawn it would not be "unfailing". God's love is constant and reliable, and it gives us the assurance that, no matter what may happen in our lives, God's presence and compassion will always sustain us. This was what Jesus taught his disciples in his final sermon in John 14-16, and it's what Jesus showed to be true in his resurrection. And, as we continue to praise God and give thanks for God's unfailing love, so our experience of God's goodness grows stronger.

How can you celebrate that your life is in God's hands today?

Practice for Today: When our faith works like a transaction with God - that we will trust if God does what we want - then it can never grow strong and sustaining. Faith like this is always in question, and can be abandoned anytime things don't go our way. But, when our faith is based in the confidence that God's love sustains us no matter what, it remains secure and becomes a source of strength in our best and worst times. This is why a daily discipline of dedication is so powerful - it ensures that we enter each day in confidence and trust. Why not renew your commitment today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: My life is in your hands, O God, and I dedicate myself to you.

Saturday 20 May 2017

Reading: John 14:27-29

Reflection: Today's short reading is part of Jesus' last sermon to his disciples before his death. At the heart of this extended teaching lie two foundational truths that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand. The first was that the life he had called them to was rooted in sacrificial love for God and for one another. The second was the assurance that there was nothing that could separate his followers from his presence and love. As he prepared his friends for his coming death, and the sense of despair they would face, Jesus assured them that his death would not be final and that they would see him again. And, though he would ultimately leave them, he

would return in another way. This is a promise of the coming Spirit who would keep his disciples in God's presence for ever.

It may sound flippant when we consider the grief and trauma that the disciples would face, but Jesus promised them a peace that could free them from fear and from living with troubled hearts. The peace of Jesus was rooted in both the promise of his presence and the fact that he had seen what was to come, and so was in control, even though it would seem that he was the victim. In our own lives we can also know this peace. The presence of Jesus' Spirit is with us in all things and assures us of God's love and grace. But, Jesus has also shown us that death is never the end. There is always a resurrection waiting to happen. Once we have learned to trust this, we begin to rest in the peace of God and live with greater confidence. We may still experience troubled hearts, but we know that our fear does not have the final word, and so it does not control us.

How can you rest in the peace of Christ today?

Practice for Today: When we practice thanksgiving, we remember what God has done for us in the past, and allow this to strengthen and reassure us for the future. In this resurrection season it can be especially powerful to remember ways in which we have experienced God's resurrection life in our own lives. Then, as we give thanks, our faith grows, and we can trust for the future - which gives us a peace that is comforting and empowering. Make time for thanksgiving today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For your life and presence that sustains and empowers me, I give you thanks, O God.

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