

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

02 - 08 July 2017

Thought for the Week:

Hospitality is described in the New Testament as a spiritual gift. This may lead us to believe that it is only required of those to whom this particular gift has been given, but this would be a mistake. In the Old Testament hospitality was expected of all of God's people, and, as with other spiritual gifts, the task of those who have received the gift of hospitality is to teach the whole church how to be hospitable. This means that the call to hospitality - to welcoming and receiving others in Jesus' name - comes to all who seek to follow Jesus.

The Gospel is built on the fact that God has offered hospitality to us. God has welcomed us into God's family and made us part of God's new community of love and justice. We have done nothing to deserve this. It is simply a gift of grace. But, in response we should find ourselves unable to resist offering hospitality to others. As we have been welcomed and accepted so we desire others to know God's grace and love, and so we seek to welcome and accept others in Jesus' name, without requiring anything of them, or expecting anything in return. If we seek to understand what it means to be holy, we will discover that hospitality is a significant feature.

This week we seek to respond to God's call to hospitality.

Sunday 02 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 10:40-42

Reflection: When Jesus appointed twelve apostles, he was declaring that he had come to renew Israel, and he was showing what this renewed people of God would look like. Then, when he sent the twelve out to proclaim God's mission, he showed how this new community would work. At the start of his instructions, Jesus told the apostles they would need to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they were going. But, then, at the end, he told them that they were to offer the hospitality of God as well. The call to hospitality must always be received as well as given.

In today's reading Jesus shows how invested God is in human beings. Anyone who received one of the apostles would be receiving Jesus himself, and in receiving Jesus, they would be receiving God. This is similar to the message of Matthew 25 in which Jesus said that whatever we do for the least we do for him.

According to Jesus the primary way we meet with God is as God comes to us through other people. This is why it is so important that we treat others with grace, respect, and dignity – they are people created in God's image through whom God is revealed. Hospitality is such a high value in God's Reign that Jesus stresses three times in these three verses that hospitable people will be rewarded.

Who needs you to offer them hospitality today? And from whom do you need to receive hospitality?

Practice for Today: When we gather together at church we remember that it is God who welcomes us, and we also remember that we are called to welcome each other. Then, as we are sent back to our daily routines, we are called to keep these two memories alive through the way we live. Today, share God's hospitality by treating everyone you meet with respect and dignity.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have welcomed me, O God, so I welcome others in your name.

Monday 03 July 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Reflection: Today's reading combines two surprisingly powerful principles for living the Jesus way. The first is to seek to love one another more and more. While the call to love is one of the first principles we encounter in following Jesus, God challenges us to constantly learn to love better. We don't learn to love quickly or easily. It is a way of living that takes a lifetime to learn. But, if we're following Jesus wholeheartedly, we should get better at loving and being loved each day. The second principle in today's short passage is to live a quiet life. In a world where, unless we're rich, famous or beautiful, we have no value, it seems unbelievable that living quietly, minding our own business, and doing ordinary work could contribute to the Reign of God. But, this is exactly how God's dream is built – through ordinary people living ordinary lives of love and generosity.

If we look at the values and habits that drive our society, we can see the wisdom in these words. Many people face with burnout as they drive themselves to achieve more and be more. Many families are break down as individuals put their own needs first. We too easily get imprisoned on a treadmill of dissatisfaction, addiction, and inadequacy as we all strive to show how great we are. But, when we refuse to play this game, and learn to live simple, quiet, contented lives, we reveal a different, more abundant way to live. As we learn to love others better, our relationships grow stronger and more life-giving. Both of these principles are at the heart of the call to hospitality, because when we value love highly, and live with simple contentment, we more easily share what we have with others.

How can you learn to love a little better today? And how can you embrace a quieter, simpler lifestyle?

Practice for Today: The act of giving is far more powerful than most of us realise. Giving is less about the one who receives than it is about the one who gives. When we practice giving, we are learning to love practically, and to live with gratitude, contentment and generosity. When giving teaches us these lessons, our lives grow more whole and more able to contribute to the wholeness of others. Make a point today of giving of your time, talents or treasures to someone who needs to be loved.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have loved me and given yourself to me, O God, so I seek to express love through generous living.

Tuesday 04 July 2017

Reading: 1 Kings 21:17-29

Reflection: Ahab was a weak and selfish man and with his wife Jezebel was guilty of many destructive actions. In particular, the prophet Elijah confronted them on their murder of Naboth and their robbery of his vineyard, which had been passed down through his family for generations. It was this that caused God to finally speak the harsh words of judgement we read today. At that time evil was considered to be passed down bloodlines, and that was why Ahab's whole family was to be destroyed. Yet, when Ahab repented, God relented. (Remember, that these stories reflect the primitive views of the writer who did not have Jesus to reveal God).

At the heart of Ahab's evil was not just his worship of other gods, but his treatment of people. He used people for his own selfish gain, and he used his power as king to take what he wanted with no concern for justice. We could say that Ahab and Jezebel were inhospitable in the extreme, and this made them destructive in a way that had wide impact on their nation. This story reveals how concerned God is for justice and how important it is that God's people live with hospitality, generosity, and compassion. When we make our own needs and desires the focus of our attention, and we ignore the needs of others, the results are always damaging, both to us and to others.

How can you grow in compassion and hospitality today?

Practice for Today: It is very hard to exploit or harm another person when you're praying for them. It is very hard to focus only on your own needs and desires when you're praying for the needs of others. This is why prayer is such a central practice of all the world's spiritualities. Prayer trains our hearts in compassion and hospitality. Today let your prayers train you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray for those around me, O God, so I learn to share your compassion and hospitality.

Wednesday 05 July 2017

Reading: Matthew 11:20-24

Reflection: Jesus' preaching of the Reign of God was not only focussed on welcoming "sinners" and the marginalised. He also confronted those who refused to embrace God's way of hospitality. In today's reading Jesus compares some of the villages where he was working to sinful cities of the Old Testament. Tyre and Sidon were wealthy trading cities, but the prophets condemned them for arrogance, selfish accumulation of wealth, and failure to "remember the covenant of brotherhood" (Amos 1:9-10). The citizens of Sodom tried to gang rape visiting strangers staying with Lot. This was not about homosexuality or even sex. Ezekiel describes the sin of Sodom as pride, gluttony, and laziness while the poor were left hungry (Ezekiel 16:49). Both towns were judged for failing to offer hospitality. Jesus confronted the people of his day for falling into the same sin – rejecting strangers and refusing to offer hospitality. But, even worse, they refused to receive the hospitality of God.

Once again we see what a high priority hospitality is for God. Followers of Jesus are called to extend compassion and welcome to strangers, to the poor and to the most vulnerable in our society. When we fail to do this, we miss the whole point of God's Reign. But, even more, when we fail to offer hospitality to others it is an indication that we have not yet really received God's hospitality - because if we had, we would not be able to resist sharing it. We all struggle with the temptation to close ourselves off from those who are different from us, or who are homeless, marginalised or poor. But, we all need to learn to turn away from this destructive behaviour, and learn to be the loving, welcoming people that Jesus calls us to be.

In what ways do you struggle to offer hospitality to others? How can you grow in your capacity to welcome others today?

Practice for Today: When we fail to be as welcoming as God wants us to be, it doesn't help if we pretend that we're doing fine. There is no healing in our denial. But, when we confess our struggle, and open our hearts to God's acceptance of us, we are changed, and we learn to be more hospitable. Today, allow the practice of confession to heal you and grow you in compassion.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I fail to be a person of true hospitality, O God, forgive me, heal me, and change me.

Thursday 06 July 2017

Reading: Romans 7:1-6

Reflection: Today the apostle Paul shares a radical understanding of the Christ-following life. Using the rather interesting analogy of a woman who is no longer legally bound by her marriage vows when her husband dies, Paul explains that we have died with Christ, and so we are no longer legally bound by the law. This teaching is startling in at least two ways. Firstly, Paul's arguments depends on the idea that followers of Jesus have died. The law only applies to the living and not to the dead, and so, for us to be free from the law, we have to die. This happens when we "die with Christ" which is how Paul describes our coming to faith. It's not common to think of faith as a death. Rather we like to think of it as entering fullness of life - which it is. But, to enter new life - resurrection life - we need to

die first, to leave our old, self-centred, self-protective lives behind. Only then can we know the second startling truth of Paul's teaching, which is that the new life we live is "in the Spirit". In Paul's vocabulary, to live by the Spirit is to turn away from any legalistic, law-based religion and be moved by a different energy - that of God's Spirit of truth and love. This life is so different from our previous existence that it's like a resurrection, and it leads to a harvest of good deeds.

It's an amazing thing to think that good deeds do not come from striving to follow a bunch of holiness rules. Rather good deeds come from dying to ourselves - dying to our tendency to place ourselves at the centre of our own universes. When we let go of our need to protect and pamper our own lives, and we begin to come alive to Jesus' way of creative, selfless love, we no longer need rules. Our hearts, which are transformed by the Spirit, automatically move us toward actions of love, compassion and hospitality.

In what ways do you still place yourself at the centre of your universe? How can you let go of this life and come alive to the Spirit's creative energy today?

Practice for Today: Dying with Christ is not a once-off experience. It is a daily choice and it is renewed moment by moment. But, we can never do this in our own strength. That's why God's new life is lived by the Spirit. Only in the Spirit's power can we become our new, truer selves in Christ. This is why we need to invoke the Spirit's presence and power every day. Go through today with a prayer of invocation for the Spirit's energy and guidance in your heart.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Holy Spirit, empower me to release my old, self-centred life and raise me to new life in Christ.

Friday 07 July 2017

Reading: Psalm 145:8-14

Reflection: The Bible has always connected the experience of God's hospitality with the need to share God's grace and goodness with others. For the biblical writers it is natural and automatic that those who have received God's mercy should pass that blessing on to those around them. The call of Jesus for his followers to share the welcome of God's Reign with others is not something new, but flows

out of the Old Testament understanding of what it means to be blessed to be a blessing. Today's Psalm describes this same understanding. It begins by describing what God is like and how God has touched and cared for God's people. It proclaims God's mercy, compassion and unfailing love. But, then it immediately declares that God's faithful followers will speak of the glory of God's Reign and will tell about God's glory and praise. Then it ends with a further affirmation of God's deep concern for the needy and oppressed.

It's not enough for us to receive God's grace and enjoy God's welcome for ourselves. While we need God's love and compassion, we also need to share the goodness we have received. It is only when we share what we have been given that we really experience the joy of it - a blessing shared is always a blessing multiplied. And, as we share, others see God's glory and grace reflected in us, which then inspires them to share what they have been given - all of which leads to a virtuous spiral of blessing!

How can you help to start a spiral of blessing in your world today?

Practice for Today: The amazing spread of God's grace that is implied in today's Psalm begins with a simple act of thanksgiving. As the people of God proclaim their thankfulness, so God's mercy and love are revealed in them, and as their thanksgiving leads them to share, so others are drawn into the circle of thanksgiving. Today, start with giving thanks for all the goodness you enjoy and see how that spreads out to bless others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I give you thanks for all the goodness I enjoy, O God, and I seek to share it with those around me.

Saturday 08 July 2017

Reading: Luke 10:21-24

Reflection: In his teaching in today's reading, Jesus states that the things of God have been hidden from those who consider themselves to be wise and clever. When we have learned everything we need to know about how to play the world's games of power, wealth and instant gratification, we may feel wise, and we may receive the applause of others. But, this wisdom actually hides God's Reign from us, because God's values are the opposite of the

world's. Rather, it is the childlike - those who have no investment in the "wisdom of this world" and who come to God with naivety and with open hearts and minds - that learn to perceive the Reign of God at work. And, of course, God's purposes and values are most clearly reflected in Jesus. The Old Testament writers caught glimpses of what was to come, but it is only those who have recognised the truth about Jesus that have seen God's Reign revealed in its fullness. And once our eyes begin to be opened, we know how blessed we are.

It may seem strange to think that God's Reign is a blessing when we remember that Jesus often speaks about God's Reign in terms of sacrifice, self-giving, and service. These things are often considered to be a duty more than a blessing - which is why it can be hard to grasp the Jesus way. But, as the counter-intuitive truth of God's Reign sinks into our hearts, we realise that abundant life is found in growing recklessly gracious, generous and compassionate. And as we begin to live this way of Jesus, we really do experience a quality of life that is peaceful, joyful, just and loving. Then, as others observe our lives, they may also catch a glimpse of this new reality.

How can you celebrate how your eyes have been opened to Jesus' way today? And how can you allow God to open your eyes even more?

Practice for Today: It doesn't take cleverness to learn to see God's Reign at work, but it does take practice, and particularly the practice of studying the Scriptures. As we read the Bible we learn to recognise what God's Reign looks like, and then, as we see similar signs emerging in our world, we can recognise them as God's Reign at work among us. Today, allow your study of the Bible to open your eyes to God's Reign.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I immerse myself in your Word, O God, so I learn to recognise and embrace your Reign in my world.

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