

## **Sacredise Daily Worship**

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

06 - 12 August 2017

### **Thought for the Week:**

Meals have always been important in God's activity in the world. The Exodus was remembered through a special Passover meal, the people of Israel were fed with manna and quail in the wilderness, and in Jesus' ministry, much of his teaching and many of his resurrection appearances happened at meal times. It seems that, in God's Reign, the sharing of food, and the connection that happens as we eat together, are essential elements. Certainly, hospitality was considered a basic expectation of all people in biblical communities, and in the New Testament hospitality is strongly linked with holiness.

This week the Gospel reading in the Lectionary relates the feeding of probably close on fifteen thousand people (the reading mentions five thousand men). As Jesus established his new community, with a new (or fulfilled) law, he also gave us a new meal to celebrate the new covenant which we enjoy with God. When we share a meal, we remember that God has provided for us, and that God is present in our fellowship and sharing. We also remember that God calls us to share God's hospitality - God's inclusive covenant - with the world.

This week we celebrate God's hospitality to us, and we learn to share it with others in whatever way we can.

### **Sunday 06 August 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 14:13-21

**Reflection:** We will probably never know for sure exactly what happened out in the wilderness that day. Many scholars speculate that, as the small portions of food were distributed, this inspired others to share whatever food they had brought along, ensuring that those who had nothing were also fed. Others prefer to think of this as a "supernatural" multiplication of food. Either way, the miracle is no less profound – thousands of people were fed at short notice in a place where there were no natural resources to provide for them. For the writer of Matthew's Gospel, there is a connection between

this feeding, and Moses' feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness, and this account serves to demonstrate that Jesus is a "new" Moses – and even greater than Moses.

This passage should challenge us with regard to our own practice of sharing and hospitality. Notice how Jesus instructed the disciples to feed the crowds. But, the disciples were only aware of scarcity. While, in this version of the story, they had a small amount of food, they had not thought of trying to share it, because it would not have been nearly enough, and it would have meant that they would have had nothing for themselves. But, as they made what they had available to Jesus, it somehow became enough. Their scarcity mentality was transformed to one of abundance, and in the process it was the disciples who did actually feed the crowd - albeit with Jesus' help and encouragement. Jesus' choice to share what he and the disciples had was a sermon in action that demonstrated the new way of living in God's Reign - the way of generosity, sharing, and hospitality. If only we could learn to embrace this way in our world today, instead of hoarding whatever we can for ourselves!

What do you have to share with others today?

**Practice for Today:** Part of the problem with how giving is done in our society today, is that it has become a cold and disconnected act. We toss out a few coins to people with whom we have no relationship, and no desire to connect. Or we place an offering in a bag with no awareness of where our money may go. New Testament giving is about building relationships in which we all share what we have with one another. Today, try to give as generously as you can to others, but also try to connect with them as human beings who are loved by God.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I give, O God, I seek to share not just my resources, but myself.

### **Monday 07 August 2017**

**Reading:** Romans 1:8-15

**Reflection:** For Paul, sharing the Gospel was about building a community, and maintaining strong, life-giving relationships with the believers. After establishing a church, Paul stayed in contact and tried to get back to visit it. He did this both because he longed to

share a “spiritual gift” (verse 11) with them, but also because he longed to be encouraged by their faith. So, while Paul was the apostle who had drawn them to Christ and who offered them his wisdom and ministry, he also knew that the believers, no matter how new or inexperienced they were in the faith, also had gifts they could give him that would enrich and strengthen him. Their love, their hospitality, and their encouragement were all valuable ways they could contribute to the life and ministry of this apostle.

It is easy, when times get tough, to feel that we have nothing to give to others. We may find ourselves focussing only on what we don't have, and withdrawing from others for fear that we will not have enough for ourselves and for them. But, when we step out of our fear and self-protection, we usually discover that others have as much to give as we do. And as we share ourselves with them, they are usually equally glad to share themselves with us. At the very least, as Paul does for the Romans, we can pray for one another and seek to bless and encourage each other.

Who needs you to share yourself with them today? And who can encourage and strengthen you, if you will let them?

**Practice for Today:** True prayer is about aligning our lives with God's values and priorities, and then allowing our connection with God to spill over into the way we live our lives. This is why Paul constantly prayed for the churches he established. It was a way of staying connected with them, and with God's dream for them. Today, allow your prayers for others to connect you more deeply with them and to lead you into loving, generous actions.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May my prayers for those around me, O God, lead me to give of myself more generously and lovingly.

## **Tuesday 08 August 2017**

**Reading:** Acts 2:37-47

**Reflection:** Today's reading comes from the famous Pentecost passage. After experiencing the power of God's Spirit the disciples ran out into the streets praising God. As a crowd gathered to see what was happening, Peter began to preach – and went on for a long time. But, the heart of his message was quite simple: God has offered grace to all people, and invites us to repent – to change from

our way to God's way – and receive the gift of God's Spirit for ourselves. This is an invitation based in God's hospitality. God longs for every one of us to find our home in God's family and love.

But, then the focus of the passage changes to the new community of believers and how they lived. Having experienced God's hospitality for themselves, these new believers couldn't help but share hospitality with one another and with their world. They were devoted to one another and to the apostle's teaching, which guided them in the way of Jesus. They shared meals, property, worship, and life together. And, as the people around them saw the difference in their lives, they joined in and were welcomed just as freely and kindly. This is an amazing vision of the power of hospitality to heal us, to connect us with each other, and to witness to the life of Christ.

How can you experience more of God's hospitality today? And how can you share this hospitality with others a little more?

**Practice for Today:** Hospitality does not have to be a burdensome thing that requires great preparation and expense. Welcoming others flows out of an attitude of gratitude for God's welcome, and is expressed in simple acts of kindness and friendliness. Today be hospitable to everyone you meet by greeting them with kindness and openness, and then treating them with dignity and respect.

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

## **Wednesday 09 August 2017**

**Reading:** Isaiah 43:1-7

**Reflection:** For the exiled people of Israel the most important thing to know was that God had not abandoned them, and had not stopped loving them. Although their exile was the consequence of their own foolishness, the prophets regularly reassured God's people that God's love was unending and that God's presence was still with them. Today's reading from Isaiah is a good example of one of these prophecies of reassurance. Here God declares, in no uncertain terms, that God's people belong to God. Nothing they could do could ever exclude them from God's love or hospitality. God assures them that God will draw them back to God and enable them to experience the joy of living in a clear experience of God's

presence and love. It is good to remember that, in those moments when we feel far from God, the feelings do not tell the truth. God is always with us.

There is a strange description, in this prophecy, of God trading God's people for other nations. In the light of Jesus' all-inclusive message this should sound strange to us. In the Old Testament view of things, only one nation belonged to God and they were favoured by God over all others. In this view, for God to "trade" other nations for God's people made sense, and was very reassuring. Part of the scandal of Jesus' message, though, was his assertion that all nations belonged to God and all people were favoured by God. God's hospitality extends to all, if we will just receive it. This means that these words of reassurance apply to you and me today, as much as they did to Israel!

How can you find rest and reassurance in God's love for you today?

**Practice for Today:** Whenever we forget that God's hospitality is freely available to us, it can be helpful to practice the discipline of praise. When we praise God, we remember who God is and what God has done for us. We remind ourselves of God's promises and faithfulness, and we find reassurance and strength. Today, allow your praises to remind you that you belong to God and find rest in this truth.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, O God, for your love that assures me that I belong to you.

#### **Thursday 10 August 2017**

**Reading:** 1 Kings 18:1-16

**Reflection:** As we have remembered God's gift of hospitality, we have also remembered that we are called to share this hospitality with others. Another word for God's hospitality is salvation. We are saved when we know that we belong to God and live as those who are God's. This always leads to our lives bringing salvation to others. This doesn't necessarily mean that we preach at our friends and neighbours and force them to pray "the sinner's prayer". Rather it means that we share God's grace and love with them in simple, practical ways that enable them to realise that God loves and welcomes them even more than we do.

In today's reading we get an example of what this kind of ministry of salvation looks like. The faithful believer Obadiah was in charge of the palace of the wicked king Ahab. This must have been very difficult for him, but he did not use it as an excuse to ignore the injustices of his world. When the queen threatened God's prophets, Obadiah sheltered them and provided food for them. This would have been very risky for his own safety, but he saved these servants of God because he knew it was the right thing to do. That's why he was surprised when Elijah asked him to take a message to the king that would almost certainly result in Obadiah's death (kings were known for killing messengers who bore bad news). But, Elijah assured him that he would not put Obadiah in danger, and so he faithfully took the message to Ahab – which was a small act that supported Elijah's work of salvation on behalf of the nation.

Sharing God's love and life does not have to be done in dramatic or difficult ways. Often it means simply protecting those who are threatened, standing up for those who don't have a voice, or providing for those who are in need. Small, practical acts of love and service are the best way to share the Gospel and lead others into a saving experience of God. Who needs you to share God's salvation with them like this today?

**Practice for Today:** Sometimes we may be tempted to view serving others as burdensome and distasteful. But, when we serve others, we discover a new joy and fullness of life for ourselves. It really is more blessed to give. Today, try to serve others in small, practical ways that reveal God's love and grace.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I long to share your salvation with others through simple acts of service, O God.

#### **Friday 11 August 2017**

**Reading:** Acts 18:24-28

**Reflection:** When we speak about sharing God's hospitality and salvation, we rightly focus on our actions, especially how we treat and serve others. But, that does not mean that our words are not important. The world into which the Gospel was first proclaimed was strongly influenced by Greek philosophical thought, and so it was often necessary for God's people to engage in debate in order to

share God's message. It seems that, at times, we have lost the value of debate in today's Church. The idea of engaging in persuasive discussion is extremely distasteful for some believers, who may feel that it involves nothing more than clever words or coercive logic. But, there is great value in allowing two divergent views to challenge each other. When debate is engaged in graciously and lovingly, it can actually be quite fun, and can open us to new ways of understanding and experiencing God. The ability to share what we believe and why is a gift that is an important part of the Church's mission, which is why Peter encouraged the believers always to be ready to give a reason for their hope (1 Peter 3:15).

In today's reading we see two examples of how gracious debate can make a difference in people's lives. Apollos was a faithful believer in Jesus, and he knew the Scriptures well. But, he still had lots to learn about his faith, and Priscilla and Aquila gently taught (debated with) him. The result was that this eloquent preacher became a very effective messenger of the Gospel, and was able to make a big impact in public debates. He also went on to be a faithful servant of the Gospel and a good friend of the apostle Paul. The challenge for us is not to be afraid to engage with others in debate when necessary, but to ensure that we always remain gracious, loving and Christlike as we do so.

How can you be more ready to give a reason for your own hope in Christ today?

**Practice for Today:** While the work of proclaiming Christ is often best done without words, there are moments when words are necessary. At these times we need to be well practiced at two things – studying the Scriptures and speaking about our faith. Today, do not shy away from any opportunities to speak about your faith, but remember to be gentle and gracious as you do.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I am ready, O God, to explain my faith and hope in you to anyone who asks.

## **Saturday 12 August 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 85:8-13

**Reflection:** Tomorrow's Lectionary readings connect us again with God's salvation. It's unfortunate that the word "salvation" has come

to be so narrowly defined in our society. For many believers salvation is nothing more than being forgiven for sins and being given a guaranteed place in heaven after we die. This view has little to offer to our world now. It is completely focussed on being "evacuated" from this world in order to start living fully in some other place after death. This is a sad reduction of the Gospel's power. This is not to say that forgiveness and eternal life are not important, but that they are only two parts of a much bigger story.

In today's Psalm we catch a glimpse of a much richer and wider view of salvation - one that makes a difference to our world now. After affirming how he listens to God's words, the Psalmist declares that God's salvation is near to those who fear (reverence) God. Then he describes what this salvation is like. God's salvation is about a marriage of righteousness (which also means justice) and peace, of love and truth. As a result of these qualities - which together confront what is evil and nurture what is good - the whole earth can experience God's life (expressed in the image of a bountiful harvest). When we truly experience and share God's salvation, it is not just people who are saved, but the entire creation!

How can you open yourself to this world-changing salvation today?

**Practice for Today:** When we make salvation only about what happens after death, we miss out on so much of the goodness God seeks to give us. But, when we make the time to remember how God is at work in our world now, we are able to open ourselves to receive and share more of God's life and grace. This is the task of thanksgiving - to remind us of what God has done and is doing among us. Today allow your thanksgiving to open you a bit more to God's salvation.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I thank you, O God, for your peace and justice, your love and truth, that bring life to me and my world.

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