

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
13 - 19 August 2017

Thought for the Week:

This week the Lectionary readings are all about God's salvation. Whether it's Joseph bringing God's salvation to Egypt, or Elijah receiving God's visitation and the power to bring salvation to Israel, or Peter and the other disciples being saved from the storm, God's work to save God's people is at the forefront of the readings. But there are always two movements to these stories. Firstly people who are under threat are rescued by an act of God, and then, secondly, they are sent to share their experience with others, both by telling their story and by being agents of salvation to other needy ones. This is the biblical pattern for all followers of God's ways – we are saved, and then we become channels of God's salvation.

What is also important about the biblical stories of salvation is that they do not focus only on what happens after we die. While there is certainly an element of being invited into God's eternal life and overcoming the power of death, salvation, in the biblical sense, is much more than this. It includes bringing healing, justice, peace, sufficiency, and joy into the world now. This is not the same as the prosperity message of some preachers, in which we simply confess whatever we want and believe God will give it to us. Rather, this is a call to participate in God's mission to make the entire world whole and one in Christ. So, as we experience God's gift of the grace, love, and strength that we need to navigate this world in fullness of life, so we seek to share it with as many others as we can.

This week we open ourselves a little more to God's saving grace, and seek to become agents of salvation in our world.

Sunday 13 August 2017

Reading: Matthew 14:22-33

Reflection: Like Moses, who, in God's power, fed the Israelites with manna in the wilderness, Jesus fed the five thousand from a few morsels of food. And now, like Moses who led the people of Israel to

safety through the sea, Jesus walks on water to save his disciples from the storm. If the writer of Matthew's Gospel wanted to reveal that Jesus was the fulfilment of God's promises through Moses, he could not have found a more powerful way to do it. Today's reading shows Jesus to be the one who brings God's salvation to all people. Even the elemental forces of nature are under his authority, and when he is present with his people, they are safe from whatever storms may arise.

A lot is made of Peter's request to walk on the water. We are often told that we need to "get out of the boat" in faith. But, what this ignores is that Peter's request was not one of faith but of fear. Verse 28 says that Peter used the call to walk on water as a way to reassure himself that it was really Jesus who was coming to them. He was afraid and used a dramatic demonstration to allay his fears. Perhaps that's why it was so easy for him to grow even more afraid and sink into the water. Perhaps that's why Jesus gently challenged him about his lack of faith, and asked him why he doubted. The doubt is what made Peter get out of the boat in the first place!

Sometimes the greatest faith, and the greatest witness to God's salvation, is not when we do dramatic things to prove God's power, but when we rest in the ordinary routines of our lives while storms rage around us. This reveals the true power of faith. How can you rest in God's grace today no matter what storms you may face?

Practice for Today: It takes practice to rest in God's grace and presence. That's why a daily spiritual discipline is so important. One of the main skills we need to learn is to keep our focus on God, and not on the storm. This is why praise is such a powerful practice. It makes God the centre of our focus, and places everything else in perspective. Allow your praises to fix your gaze on Jesus today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, and I fix my gaze on you – not on the storms around me.

Monday 14 August 2017

Reading: Psalm 28

Reflection: The prayer in today's Psalm contains a wonderful mix of personal and social concerns, and of celebration and request. It would seem that the writer has experienced some struggle, either

through a personal failing, or through some threat from others. Whatever the case, he pleads with God not to treat him like an evildoer, but to rescue him. Then, in response to what must have been an experience, or a memory, of God's presence and grace, the Psalmist burst out in praise and celebrates that God is worthy of trust and is a protective covering. But, God's salvation is not just for individuals. The last verses of the Psalm declare that God gives strength to all of God's people, and God leads them like a shepherd.

Notice how the Psalmist defines wickedness. He describes evildoers as those who speak kindly, but plan evil in their hearts. They are duplicitous, deceptive, and destructive toward others. The fruit of their lives is the opposite of the generous, uplifting, and healing impact of those who follow God's ways. Once again, it is clear that receiving God's salvation happens now, and sharing that salvation with others, is about bringing life to them here and now.

How have you experienced God as a protective shield in your life? How can you share that security with someone else today?

Practice for Today: As the Psalmist offered his petition to God, he found assurance and strength in remembering how God had cared for him, and by giving thanks for what he had already experienced. This is one of the gifts of thanksgiving – it reminds us of how we have already enjoyed God's salvation, and it builds trust for what is to come. Today, allow your thanksgiving to reconnect you with God's presence and grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I thank you, O God, for all the ways I have already experienced your salvation in my life.

Tuesday 15 August 2017

Reading: Genesis 19:1-29

Reflection: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a disturbing story, but we need to begin by understanding a few background facts. Firstly, Lot's visitors are described as angels – divine messengers – investigating the city. If we go back in the story, we read of God saying that God needed to “go down” to see what was happening. Clearly this is a primitive understanding of God, lacking any sense that God's presence and knowledge fill everything. Secondly, in those times, hospitality was considered a universal

obligation, and to refuse it, or to harm a guest, was the greatest of evils. This is what the prophet Ezekiel describes as the great sin of Sodom (See Ezekiel 16:49). Finally, the demand by the men of the town for Lot to let them “have sex with” his guests, was not about sex (or homosexuality). It was about rape – the ultimate violation of a guest, and the ultimate refusal to show hospitality and provide for those in need. It was a failure to be hospitable that destroyed these cities – although how that destruction actually happened is shrouded in mystery (as is the death of Lot's wife).

But, what does this mean for us? Firstly, it reveals how committed God is to hospitality, to serving those in need, and to welcoming strangers. If we use this story as an excuse to exclude or judge others, we are actually behaving more like the townspeople who were judged than we may care to admit. Secondly, this passage reveals that God rescues God's people. This does not mean that God destroys all others – Jesus made it clear that God is not like that. It simply means that God's presence and protection can sustain us in the most traumatic circumstances. Our job is to trust in God's love, and to be people of compassion and hospitality in whatever way we can. In this way we share God's grace and love with others.

What do you need to do as an act of faith in God's care today? And how can you show hospitality to someone who needs it?

Practice for Today: Compassion for others often begins in prayer. As we pray for those in need, we begin to feel some measure of their grief, and we are drawn to care for their situation. Often this leads us to act on behalf of those for whom we pray. Today allow your prayers to lead you into compassion, in attitude and action.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I pray for those who need a touch of your hospitality, O God, and I seek to be a channel of your compassion.

Wednesday 16 August 2017

Reading: Matthew 8:23-27

Reflection: Matthew's Gospel has two accounts of Jesus helping his disciples as their boat was threatened by a storm. We read the second of the two on Sunday, and today we return to the first. While in Matthew 14 the Gospel writer may well have had Moses' Red sea crossing in mind, in today's reading it is more likely that he was

remembering the story of Jonah. This Old Testament prophet was caught up in a storm as he tried to sail away from God's call for him to preach to the city of Nineveh. As the storm buffeted the ship, Jonah slept soundly. But finally he was woken by the crew, and realised that he was the problem. The rest of the story is well known. In today's reading Jesus is presented as a kind of "Anti-Jonah".

Where Jonah ran away from God's call, Jesus embraced the call and willingly set out for a Gentile region (known as Gadara). But, as he and his disciples sailed across the lake, a storm hit. Jesus, like Jonah, was asleep, and needed to be woken by his friends. But, where Jonah was at the mercy of the elements – the storm could only be calmed by throwing the prophet into the sea – Jesus had authority over nature, and easily calmed the storm. Once again we are reminded that God's gift of salvation is always with us, even in the most difficult times, if we remain in Jesus' presence. But, of course, nothing could stop Jesus' commitment to heal those who were oppressed by evil. It seems that there was no other reason for this trip than to encounter and free the demoniacs!

What do you allow to stop you sharing God's grace with others? How can you overcome this today, and strengthen your commitment to be an agent of salvation to others?

Practice for Today: Sometimes the only reason we fail to reflect God's grace and love in our lives is that we allow our own storms to get in the way. If we could just still the turbulence around and within us, we would find it much easier to treat others with patience, grace, and respect. This is why we need the help and strength of God's Spirit, and why we need the discipline of invoking the Spirit. It is God's Spirit that enables us to rise above the storms, and live like Jesus. Invite the Spirit to strengthen you today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, still my storms and empower me to share your grace with those around me.

Thursday 17 August 2017

Reading: Revelation 15:1-4

Reflection: Today's reading offers an inspiring vision of hope and celebration, which comes about because of those who have remained faithful to God's ways and have not been overcome by the

world's evil. It's important, as we wrestle with the suffering, inequality, conflict and injustice in our world, to remember that there will come a time when we will celebrate victory over these evils. If we can remain faithful to the values and priorities of God's Reign, and if we can share God's dream with others in such a way that they also embrace it, we will see the day when we celebrate a world of justice, grace, unity, and wholeness. But, celebration is not just our hope. It is also a powerful motivator. When we are intentional about celebrating God's grace and goodness in our own lives, and in whatever small victories we experience, we are strengthened and empowered to continue to work for God's saving dream.

Notice how, in this vision, God's salvation is viewed as global and all embracing. In verse 3 God is called the "King of the nations", not just King of the Church, or of a certain nation. And in the last line of verse 4 the writer describes all nations coming to worship God together. What a wonderful vision to hold on to – of a world which is united in celebration of God's Reign, in which no one is excluded, marginalised, or rejected, and in which evil has been defeated! This is the vision toward which we are called to work, and it is in small, daily acts of kindness, love, and service that this dream is built.

What can you do today to contribute in some small way to God's dream of a united, healed world?

Practice for Today: Every time we serve another person, expecting nothing back, we make a contribution to the world. Each time we treat another person with respect, or forgive a wrong, or give to someone in need, we help the world to become a little kinder and more whole. This is the essential work of following Jesus and building God's Reign among us. Today, seek every opportunity to serve someone else for the sake of God's dream.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I celebrate your dream of a healed world, O God, and I seek to contribute through acts of kindness and grace.

Friday 18 August 2017

Reading: Isaiah 63:15-19

Reflection: If you can read today's lament from Isaiah and not feel a resonance in your own heart, then you have probably never felt like God has abandoned you – and you are very fortunate indeed. For

most of us, though, the cry of the prophet on behalf of God's people will feel uncomfortably familiar. While this psalm-like poem is part of the third book of Isaiah, which probably dates to the period after the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, it lacks the joy we might expect from people who have come home again. Rather, it expresses the pain of returning to a devastated nation and a Temple that was nothing more than rubble. God is addressed as a distant and aloof deity who is up in heaven, and who seems to be absent and uninvolved. Yet, even in the midst of this grief and despair the people still look to God to save them.

It is interesting that the people almost seem to blame God for the actions that brought such devastating consequences on their nation. In verse 17 the people ask why God has allowed them to stray and why God has given them stubborn hearts. When we are suffering it can be much easier to blame others, or even God, than to face the truth about ourselves, especially if our suffering is the result of our own destructive choices. But, until we recognise our need to change, we cannot find healing. Even if our suffering is not because of our own fault, it can be tempting to fall into the blame game, rather than to seek a way of grace and trust to guide us through our pain. But, such divisive choices never lead us to the peace we desire. Only the tough and courageous choice to trust in the midst of our struggles can do that.

How can you affirm your trust in God again today?

Practice for Today: Creeds – statements of faith – have always been an important part of Christian worship. The point of saying creeds is not to give intellectual assent to certain ideas. It is to reaffirm our decision to place our lives in God's hands and to trust God's ways. Today, create a short creed for yourself and carry it with you through whatever you may face.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In times of struggle and in times of joy I place my trust in you, O God.

Saturday 19 August 2017

Reading: Matthew 14:34-36

Reflection: The writer of Matthew's Gospel is bold to proclaim that, in Jesus, God's Reign had arrived. The healing stories, of which

there are many, are used as evidence of the Reign of God being manifest through Jesus, and overcoming every force that oppresses God's people. But all the Gospels also describe an ambivalence in Jesus about the healing work he did. Although Jesus willingly and freely healed people, he also knew that they were easily seduced by a faith in miracles, rather than a faith in God's Messiah. It is clear that it was the healings that drew the crowds, as Matthew describes in today's reading. Jesus' willingness to heal reveals God's mercy. But, the ultimate healing comes as Jesus absorbs evil and violence into himself, overcoming our worst through love and self-giving.

A significant feature of Matthew's Gospel is the repetition of sweeping statements about Jesus' healing work. He often mentions large groups of people being brought to Jesus, and he often uses the word "all" when recounting who received healing. This may cause us some distress when we realise that not all sick and broken people are healed in our time. However, Matthew's point is not to create a tally of miracles, but to reveal that in Christ all people find wholeness and liberation. We may not always be cured, but we can always receive healing.

What healing do you need today? And what healing can you share with those around you through the simple act of love?

Practice for Today: One of the most powerful elements in Jesus' healing work was his willingness to be with those who were suffering. He touched the untouchable, welcomed the rejected, and loved the unlovable. If we seek to receive and share healing, we will need to adopt a similar attitude. Today, share healing by being present to others - especially those who are struggling.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I share your love and presence with others, O God, so I share your healing.

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