

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
27 August – 02 September 2017

Thought for the Week:

What do we mean when we speak of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour? There are so many meanings to these words that we need to be careful not to reduce them to only a small glimpse of the whole. One of the ways we reduce the power of these titles is when we make them all about escaping from this world and spending eternity somewhere else. Jesus does offer us forgiveness, freedom from the power of sin, and eternal life. But, Jesus also offers us a new way of living here and now. As Messiah, Jesus is the one who establishes God's Reign among us, and who empowers us to live as citizens of God's Reign who participate in making God's dream for the cosmos a reality. As Saviour, Jesus breaks the power of evil, death, violence, retaliation, and hatred by absorbing the worst that humanity can do and refusing to retaliate, and by showing us a different way to live. In this way, Jesus saves us from our worst selves, here and now, and leads us to live from our best.

So, we have no need to wait for heaven after we die. We can begin to experience God's life, grace, love, liberty and justice now - God's kingdom coming to us here on earth, as Jesus taught us to pray. And, as we grow in our understanding and experience of God's Reign, so we begin to share the life and love we have received with those around us. In this way we contribute to the expansion of God's dream in the world, and we participate in the saving work of Jesus.

This week we meditate on God's salvation as a present reality in which we participate here and now.

Sunday 27 August 2017

Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Reflection: Jesus adopted a title for himself – Son of Man – that was used in two ways in the Old Testament. God calls the prophet Ezekiel “Son of man” to remind him of his humanity and his mortality. But, in the book of Daniel, “one like a son of man” is given

authority, power, and glory over all nations. It seems that Jesus applied both of these meanings to himself. He was human and divine, mortal and immortal, humble and glorified. When he asked the disciples who they thought he was, he was investigating whether they had begun to recognise his paradoxical nature. Peter's declaration showed that he had begun to grasp a glimpse of it. However, in the next few verses, as he rebuked Jesus for predicting his coming death, Peter showed that he still had a lot to learn.

Jesus' response to Peter's words is enigmatic and exciting. He stated that the church would be built on this recognition of Jesus as Messiah, and he declared that evil would not overcome God's new community. Then he spoke about the “keys of the kingdom” – which simply means that we have heaven's power to release people from the power of evil and injustice, and to limit the impact of evil and injustice in our world. God has given us the task of “loosing” people from bondage and to bind the systems and people that bring suffering on others. The challenge is for us to recognise that we can impact the world for justice and love in Jesus' name, and to use this God-given power for the sake of those around us.

What evil do you need to “forbid” or “bind” in your world today? And what justice can you “permit” or “loose”?

Practice for Today: The best way for us to proclaim our faith in Jesus, and participate in God's saving work, is to seek justice, peace, love, and equality for those around us. We do this in small acts of compassion, generosity, love, and solidarity. When we stand alongside the vulnerable and use our resources and our voice to uplift them, we are proclaiming Jesus' Messiahship and the presence of God's Reign. And the simplest way to do this is to treat every person with dignity, grace, and kindness. Today let your interactions with others be kind and gracious.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Jesus, you are the Christ, and I will proclaim this by treating all people with kindness and dignity.

Monday 28 August 2017

Reading: Romans 2:1-11

Reflection: Today's reading contains Paul's rather harsh reprimand of the Roman Christians. It seems that they were quick to judge

people for actions that they considered to be sinful, but failed to recognise that they were doing the same things. Chapter One reveals that the particular sin that Paul was confronting was idolatry – the failure to honour and worship God as God. This idolatry manifested itself in all sorts of destructive behaviour. But, it was not people “out there” that Paul was concerned with. It was the people in the Christian community, who, while giving themselves to the quest for their own pleasure, power, and possessions, were condemning others. This hypocrisy was totally unacceptable to Paul. So, the apostle challenged the people to show others the same patience, kindness, and generosity that God shown to them.

Paul declared that God will judge everyone by what they have done. This is the same person who is famous for saying that we are saved by grace alone. This is not a contradiction, but a clearer picture of how salvation works. It is God’s grace that leads us to life and salvation, but this same grace leads us to live with grace, kindness, and love toward others. The extent to which we are able to show grace is a reflection of the extent to which we have received grace. We cannot really speak about being saved until we show our salvation in the way we love our families, our neighbours, our co-workers, and the strangers who cross our path. In living as Jesus did we reflect the glory, honour and peace of God in which there is no favouritism.

How can you allow God’s grace to flow into and through you today?

Practice for Today: It is easy to point fingers and judge others. It is much harder to try to understand them, and to offer forgiveness, grace and love. But, this is exactly what we are called to do. We learn to treat others well by praying for them – especially those whom we are tempted to judge. Today, allow your prayers to lead you deeper into God’s grace – for you and for others.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray, O God, fill me with grace so that I may share your grace with others.

Tuesday 29 August 2017

Reading: Exodus 2:11-15a

Reflection: Today’s reading makes it clear that Moses had always been disturbed by injustice. Although he had grown up in Pharaoh’s court, he seems to have retained a sense of his Jewish heritage. As

he saw his people being oppressed by the Egyptians, he obviously grew angry and longed for their freedom. So, when he saw an Egyptian beating one of his Jewish compatriots, he responded with violence. But, when the news of his act got out, Moses realised that it would no longer be safe for him to remain in Egypt and so he fled.

Moses’ attempts to be a saviour to his people as a young man were unhelpful, and were based in a passion that had not counted the cost. He started with his own ideas of liberation without taking stock of the sacrifice and struggle that would be required in the fight for justice. Unfortunately, for all our willingness to serve others, we sometimes make the same mistake. We may too easily jump to solutions before understanding the problems. Or we may feel that bringing God’s justice into the world depends solely on our strength, strategies and wisdom. Often it takes a great failure before we learn the wisdom and humility to really be useful instruments in God’s hands - as was the case with Moses. Yet, even this is all part of participating in the work of salvation for others, and for ourselves.

How can you release your assumptions about the problems in your world? And how can you allow God to guide you in God’s strategy to contribute to the salvation of those around you today?

Practice for Today: One of the most overlooked, but powerful practices for participating in the healing of our part of the world, is listening. As we listen, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalised in our communities, we begin to see things differently, and we become more open to the voice of the Spirit. Today, adopt an attitude of listening especially when you encounter strangers.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I listen to others, O God, may your Spirit speak through them to guide me in Christlike service.

Wednesday 30 August 2017

Reading: Matthew 26:6-13

Reflection: The story of the woman who anointed Jesus is open to all sorts of misunderstandings. The disciples’ horrified condemnation of her act as wasteful echoes how easily we judge others when their service of Christ fails to make sense to us. It is all too easy to feel that we have the right understanding of how best to worship God, follow Jesus, or serve those in need. But, when we allow this kind of

arrogance to slip into our hearts, we miss sharing in so much good work that is being done around us. The disciples' missed the impact this small act could have on the world – and how it could potentially bring even greater benefit to the poor. In the previous chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explained that any act done for "the least" is done for him. So, once Jesus was no longer physically present in the world, this woman's act could become an example of selfless sacrifice given to Jesus who would now be encountered in the poor.

Unfortunately, this passage has often been used to justify ignoring the needs of the poor. Contrary to how some interpreters have used this passage, Jesus' words that "You will always have the poor among you" were not meant to let us off the hook. In fact, these words are a quote from Deuteronomy 15:11 which contains a command to give freely to the poor. However, in this woman's case, there was another, necessary agenda at work, whether she knew it or not. Jesus declared that she was preparing his body for burial.

Where, in your life, do you judge the service of others? How can you stop doing this and serve Christ by giving to those in need today?

Practice for Today: It is tempting to perceive the act of giving as an act that will only be necessary until we fix the problem of poverty. However, Jesus made it clear that until God's Reign is fully established among us, there will always be those in need of generous support and help. This is why giving is to be practiced constantly. At its best, giving connects giver and receiver in a reciprocal relationship of care and service. Today, let your giving connect you a little more deeply with those in need.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I give myself to you, Jesus, so I serve you in giving to those in need.

Thursday 31 August 2017

Reading: Ephesians 5:1-6

Reflection: These instructions from Ephesians may look like a list of "thou shalt nots" but they are not meant that way. On the contrary, they are simply descriptions of a Christ-following life. The only instruction is the call to imitate God by living a love-filled, self-giving life. The list of forbidden behaviours that follows simply shows what the opposite of a love-filled life looks like. Immorality, impurity and

greed are all selfish acts that bring pain to others and ourselves. Unfortunately society seems to have ignored greed, which is as destructive as immorality and impurity, but seems more acceptable.

Many forms of self-serving spirituality justify selfishness in Christ's name. But, they never lead us into a deep connection with God and others. This is why the writer explains that those who live by these self-centred values will never inherit God's Kingdom. We cannot know what it is to live in a community of love and mutual care if our focus is only on ourselves. Following Jesus can only happen in relationship with others, and in sacrificial, loving service.

Where are you tempted to make your faith about yourself? How can you learn to imitate God a little more today and live a love-filled life?

Practice for Today: To learn to live an increasingly love-filled life we have to acknowledge where our lives are not filled with love. This means being willing to admit where we choose selfishness, greed and impurity over what brings life and wholeness to others. It also means embracing the practices of confession and repentance in which we release our old ways and embrace the new way of Jesus. Today, make time to do the life-giving work of repentance.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I choose myself over love, O God, forgive me and help me to change.

Friday 01 September 2017

Reading: Psalm 26:1-8

Reflection: The Christ-following life is not a thoughtless way of being, and it is not a lazy way of easy comfort and pleasure. If it was, Jesus could not have promised us abundant life. Anything worthwhile takes work, mindfulness, and constant reflection. We need to engage our whole selves in the quest to enjoy and share God's salvation. We need to study the way of Jesus and learn to understand it with our minds. We need to live into the story of God's grace and allow God's dream to capture our hearts. And we need to practice the habits of forgiveness, compassion, service, sacrifice, inclusion, and justice - disciplining our bodies to automatically act according to the values and priorities of Jesus. But, if we are willing to do this work, we grow each day into a deeper experience of life and a deeper connection with God and others.

Today's Psalm gives an example of the kind of reflective work that we need to do. It is attributed to David, who was no stranger to confession and repentance. He did much in his life that required him to acknowledge guilt and make changes. But, in today's Psalm he comes with confidence before God because, in this moment, he knows that his heart is true and pure. He confidently invites God to test his motives and put him on trial, because he knows that he has not copied the ways of liars, hypocrites and evildoers. He has done the work to live from his best self, and while he would certainly know that he may stumble again, in this Psalm he celebrates and gives thanks to God. And, in this moment - even as in his moments of failure - he loves being in the sanctuary where he can know the sense of God's presence. This is the benefit of doing the work of faith: it brings us the strength and courage we need to embrace the call to give our lives in service of others.

What work do you need to do today to grow a little more into the person God created you to be?

Practice for Today: The Ignatian prayer of examen is a simple practice that guides us in doing the work of faith. In the morning, we spend time preparing for the day, identifying possible areas of temptation or struggle and asking for God's strength. We also make note of places of potential joy and celebration and prepare to enjoy them and those with whom we share them. Then, in the evening, we review the day, asking for forgiveness for moments of failure, and giving thanks for moments of goodness and joy. Why not embrace this practice today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: Search me, O God, know my heart and lead me in your ways of life.

Saturday 02 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 8:14-17

Reflection: Immediately after the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus' manifesto of God's Reign in Matthew's Gospel, the writer describes how Jesus lived out the principles of God's Reign in his life and ministry. He relates a number of healing stories, with a special focus on those who would have been considered to be excluded from God's grace and love - a leper, a centurion, a Gentile

demoniac, a woman who had struggled with constant menstrual bleeding for twelve years. At a number of points in his story the writer includes brief accounts of general healings in which "everyone" is healed or liberated. Today's reading is one of these.

It begins with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, who is a kind of representative of the people of God. She is a good Jewish mother, who represents all that is acceptable and honourable in God's people. But, she is dangerously sick, and so Jesus heals her. Immediately she gets up and serves a meal to Jesus and his friends. But, then, the town brings out all their sick and demonised people, and again, Jesus heals them. Finally Matthew makes his point - in doing this work Jesus fulfils the "Suffering Servant" prophecy of Isaiah. The Reign of God, which he proclaims in his actions, is one of service, sacrifice, and taking on the brokenness of the world in order to bring healing. This points forward to the ultimate healing Jesus will bring through his crucifixion. The implication is that we who follow Jesus are also called to take on the brokenness of our world and offer the healing and life of Jesus to those around us.

How can you respond to God's call for you to be a "suffering servant" to those in your world?

Practice for Today: In order for Jesus to serve and heal people the way he did, he had to release any temptation to judge or blame them for their condition. He simply needed to have compassion on them, and then reach out to touch them with grace and love. This non-judgemental acceptance is one of the hardest practices of following Jesus to learn, but it is also one of the most important. Today, whenever you are tempted to judge someone, try to be gracious and look for ways to offer healing instead.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have taken on my brokenness, Jesus, so I seek to be a channel of your grace and healing to others.

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