

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
03 – 09 September 2017

Thought for the Week:

The idea of sacrifice is not a popular one in contemporary society, even though we often applaud those who endure great sacrifice for the common good. It's ironic that we recognise the value of sacrifice in the lives of others – especially when we benefit from their self-giving – but seek to avoid sacrifice in our own lives. However, when we realise that the word “sacrifice” literally means “to make holy” it becomes clear that sacrifice is a necessary part of growing into our best (holiest or most whole) selves. As the Psalmist proclaimed, God does not require the blood of animals or people as a sacrifice. The sacrifice that God seeks is that of a broken and contrite heart.

The Bible is filled with stories of those who, in their quest to serve God and others, were willing give of themselves and their resources, but of course, the most significant of these is Jesus. He showed what it looks like to choose love over violence or apathy, and made it clear that not even death has the power to overcome the power of love and self-giving. But, as we see in this Sunday's Gospel reading, even Jesus' disciples struggled to understand the necessity of sacrifice. That's why we need to remember that Jesus chose to live in love even though he knew in advance what the consequences would be. And he called us to follow him in this way of love.

This week we meditate on the life-giving power of sacrificial love.

Sunday 03 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 16:21-28

Reflection: When Peter made his famous declaration of Jesus as Messiah, he showed that he was beginning to understand who Jesus really was. But, he did not really understand what Jesus meant to do. He still viewed the Messiah the way other people did – as a nationalistic military commander who would overthrow the Romans and establish a Jewish state. That's why, when Jesus predicted his coming crucifixion, Peter was shocked and tried to

deny it. Notice how he took Jesus aside in order to reprimand him. This rather patronising act was the catalyst for Jesus' strong response: “Get away from me, Satan!” The temptation to avoid the cross must have been so strong for Jesus, but he knew that to choose any other alternative would be to turn his back on love, and on the Reign of God. He also knew that he could not call his followers to lay down their lives if he was unwilling to do this himself.

The final statement in today's reading is somewhat enigmatic. Did Jesus get it wrong when he said that some would not die before they saw him coming in his kingdom? Jesus was probably referring to his resurrection when the true power of God's Reign would be revealed, and he would return from death as God's victorious monarch. If we read this statement in this way, we can also see it as a promise. Even as Jesus came through his time of sacrifice, with a life that was more abundant, so too can we. But, to get to the resurrection, we have to go through the cross first.

How do you need to lay down your life today if you are to find the new, abundant life that Jesus offers?

Practice for Today: The act of giving often becomes a shadow of what it is meant to be. Giving is meant to be so much more than just throwing a few coins into a bag. The discipline of giving is about making sacrifice a constant feature of our lives. When we give we are really offering our whole selves to God and God's Reign, and we commit our lives to bringing God's love and life into our small corner of the world. Today, use every opportunity to give sacrificially.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I give of my time, talents and resources, O God, I offer my whole self for the sake of your Reign.

Monday 04 September 2017

Reading: Exodus 4:10-31

Reflection: Moses had to go through some very difficult experiences before he was ready to face the ruler of Egypt. The first of these was that he had to face his own sense of inadequacy. He was not a good speaker, and was afraid that either he would look like a fool when he tried to persuade the Jews to follow him, or that he would mess up God's message and the whole project would fail. But, God encouraged him and ensured he had a spokesperson who

could make up for his lack. If Moses struggled like this, it's not surprising that we find following Jesus hard. And if God could strengthen Moses, then God can do the same for us.

But, the second experience in today's reading is far less comforting. In verse 24 we read that God was about to kill Moses! Why would God seek to kill the person God had just appointed as God's messenger and liberator? This account was most likely written at a time when everything that happened, good or bad, was considered to be a direct act of God. So, whatever Moses was struggling with, the writers saw it as God's doing. Fortunately, Jesus gave us a more accurate vision of God! We can't know for sure what happened, but the point of the writers was to show that, when God's people face trials on their path of obedient service, it is their commitment to the covenant (represented by the circumcision of Moses' son) that frees them and gives them the strength to stay faithful.

What trials are you facing in your quest to follow Jesus? How can you renew your covenant with God and let that strengthen you?

Practice for Today: When life gets tough it is all too easy to give up – on ourselves, or on our loved ones, or on our dreams of making a contribution. That's why we need to remember how committed God is to us, and how much we need to stay committed to Jesus' way. The practice of thanksgiving is one of the most powerful ways to remember what God has done, and to strengthen our faith for the future. Let your thankfulness strengthen your faith today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When trials come, O God, I give thanks and remember your covenant with me.

Tuesday 05 September 2017

Reading: Revelation 3:7-13

Reflection: The church in Philadelphia was a struggling, persecuted community, but they clung to their faith and persevered. So, the writer of the Revelation wrote to comfort and encourage them. He affirmed that God was aware of their struggle and faithfulness, and would protect them and keep them in God's "house" – God's presence – always. They would be called by God's name – claimed as part of God's family – and would live forever in God's new city. What a comforting message this was for this vulnerable community!

There are two ways that God's promise can be understood. The first is that the faithful believers would, at some point in the future, be taken out of the world and be given a place in an eternal, otherworldly city. This is how this passage is most commonly understood. But, the promise of God could also apply to how the believers would experience life in the midst of their suffering. Notice that the New Jerusalem comes "down from heaven" (verse 12). It may be that the writer meant to encourage church to experience God's life and presence even while they were being persecuted. They did not need to wait for heaven after death. They could experience it right away. All they had to do was stay faithful to Jesus' way.

Although, for most of us, our struggles are small compared to the Philadelphians, we can also live in God's presence here and now. How can you live in God's holy city where you are today?

Practice for Today: God's Reign is not a destination, but a way of being. We do not "go to heaven" so much as we learn to "see" and live in heaven. When this truth reaches our hearts, everything changes, and we begin to know a sense of belonging in God's presence that filters through every facet of our lives. This is why we need the practice of invocation. When we invite God's Spirit to make God's presence known, we become aware that we always "live and move and have our being" in God's life and love. Invite God's Spirit to give you this gift today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Come, Holy Spirit, and make me aware of how I always live within God's presence and love.

Wednesday 06 September 2017

Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-18

Reflection: It would seem that, from the Bible's perspective, there are only two ways to live a human life. We may choose to avoid all pain and sacrifice, focus on our own comfort and pleasure, and ignore the ways of God, or we may choose to trust in God's ways, care for one another, and seek to bring life into our world. If we choose the first, self-centred path, we will never experience God's fullness of life, but if we choose the second, God-centred path, our lives are richer and make a valuable contribution to the world.

Jeremiah confronted his people with this same choice in today's reading. He warned those who trust in human strength and wisdom that their lives would be "stunted". They may enjoy riches for a time, but in the end it would all amount to nothing. But, the prophet also offered an invitation. Those who trusted in God could find a source of life that could not be quenched, and would know healing and intimacy with God.

But, before we choose which way we will go, we need to recognise that our hearts can deceive us. We may think we're following Jesus, but allow the values and priorities of our own selfish agendas to drive us. So, we first need to do the tough, sacrificial work of examining our hearts with the help of God's searching Spirit. Will you open your heart to God's Spirit and allow God to lead you into God's sacrificial, life-giving ways today?

Practice for Today: The work of examining our hearts can be difficult because it may force us to see things about ourselves that we would rather ignore. But, until we allow God's Spirit to show us our true selves, we cannot be healed. This is why confession is more than just apologising for a list of "sins". It is a self-examining quest to root out evil within us and find healing. Make time today to do the work of confession under the guidance of God's Spirit.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Search me, O God, show me the truth about my heart, and lead me to healing.

Thursday 07 September 2017

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Reflection: Today we begin to prepare our hearts for Sunday. This week, the readings call us to work on our relationships with God and with one another, which requires us to do the work of forgiveness and reconciliation. The promise is that our unity will bring us greater power in our prayers and a deeper sense of Christ's presence. Today, we read Paul's strong words of confrontation to those in the Corinthian church who questioned his integrity and leadership. Although the apostle had to confront the lies and arrogance of those who were leading the community astray, his motive was not self-seeking. He acted "like a fool" and listed his credentials as an apostle in order to win the church over so that they would know

greater unity and love. This was tough, sacrificial work for Paul, but he did it willingly.

Two statements reveal Paul's heart. The first is that he didn't want what the believers had. He just wanted them. He longed only for relationship. The second is that he feared that God would humble him in their presence because they had not given up on their sins. This means that if the believers failed to live a Christlike life, Paul would take responsibility for this and feel embarrassed before God that he had failed them by not teaching them properly. He did not blame them for their failures. He blamed himself! His love for them was such that there was no judgment, but only the desire to lead them into God's life. Imagine if we took responsibility for one another's well-being in this way!

How can you release your judgement of others and take responsibility for showing them the way of Jesus through acts and attitudes of love and grace?

Practice for Today: In our increasingly individualistic society it sound may sound strange to speak of taking responsibility for one another. This does not mean controlling others, or judging them. Rather it means committing ourselves to seek the best for one another, acting with grace, forgiveness, and selfless love toward each other. It's really about making kindness, not condemnation or control, the basis of our relationships. Today, do your best to treat everyone you meet with a welcoming kindness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Fill me with your kindness, O God, that I may treat all people with grace and acceptance in your name.

Friday 08 September 2017

Reading: Romans 10:15b-21

Reflection: The book of Romans is sometimes called the "Gospel of Paul". This is because in this letter Paul outlines the broken human condition and how God has acted to bring us freedom and life, and then he explains how we can live God's life through the power of God's Spirit. One of the big questions he addresses is where the chosen people of Israel fit into God's plan of salvation. His answer is striking - those who receive the message of Christ, both Jew and Gentile, are the "Israel of God" while those who reject Christ's

message are not, regardless of their birth or nationality. In this sense, the “true Israel” and the Reign of God can be thought of as two names for the same thing.

In today’s reading Paul addresses the question of how people are to become part of this true Israel. The answer is that someone must be sent to share “Good News”. The truth is that anyone who follows Jesus has been sent to share Good News with others. Unfortunately we often think our task is about persuading people to accept certain ideas, and the ideas we share often sound like very bad news to those who hear it. But, when we realise that the best way to share the Good News of Christ’s grace is through serving and loving others as Jesus did, our whole lives become a proclamation, not just our words. And others are far more likely to view our humble acts of compassion as Good News - rather than the judgement many have come to expect from the church.

How can you proclaim Good News through humble acts of compassionate service today?

Practice for Today: It is important to recognise that our lives do proclaim a message to those around us. The question is whether our message is Good News or bad news. We all make mistakes. We all get angry and do things that fail to reflect the grace of Christ. But, when the trajectory of our lives is toward grace and compassion, people notice and overlook our mistakes. Today, do your best to let your life be Good News to those around you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I follow you, Jesus, may my life be Good News to the people I encounter each day.

Saturday 09 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 23:29-36

Reflection: Today’s reading may seem out of place in a series of meditations about reconciliation and unity. When Jesus confronted the religious leaders of his day, he did not come across as gracious and accepting. On the contrary he denounced their hypocrisy and injustice in the strongest terms. If we believe that grace and compassion require us to turn a blind eye to acts of injustice, of doing deliberate harm to others, or of hypocritical self-righteousness, we have misunderstood Jesus’ message. Jesus recognised that

there would always be evil in human hearts that needed to be confronted, but he drew the lines between good and evil in very different places from the Pharisees.

The religious leaders defined good and bad in terms of strict obedience to laws of purity, and because they were able to fulfill their own requirements, they were extremely proud of themselves. But, they were blind to the evil in their own hearts. They could look back on history and claim that they would have listened to the prophets their ancestors had killed, yet they attacked the prophets in their midst - John the Baptist and Jesus. In their failure to see their own brokenness they were just as unjust and heartless as their forebears. But, if any of them had received Jesus’ words, repented and changed (as some did) Jesus would willingly have welcomed them and reconciled with them.

The temptation for us is to place ourselves in Jesus’ shoes and point out the hypocrisy of others. But, shouldn’t we start by dealing with our own brokenness and hypocrisy first. How can you do this today?

Practice for Today: Only those who have done the hard and painful work of confronting the evil in their own hearts can confront the evil in others. There is a mark of humility and grace in people like this that enables them to say tough things without judgement or hatred. In order to face the evil in the world, we need to have been humbled enough to love those whom we confront. And this love flows out of an awareness that God loves us enough to confront our brokenness. The practice of praise can help us to see how far we fall short of God’s glory, and also remind us of how much God loves us anyway. Let your praises change your heart in this way today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your love that enables me to confront the evil in my own heart and in my world.

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