

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
10 - 16 September 2017

Thought for the Week:

For God's Reign to become a reality in our world, we must heal the brokenness, violence, injustice, and division that oppose it. The problem is when we begin by identifying evil only outside of us. Then we inevitably ignore the evil within us, and become self-righteous, judgemental and even aggressive as we oppose "the others" in whom we see all that is wrong with the world. This happens both on a global and an inter-personal scale.

But, until we have faced and healed the brokenness and violence within our own hearts, we are unable to be agents of healing to the world. Rather, we find ourselves in the contradictory position of believing we can bring peace through war, unity through judgement, and justice through coercion or domination. It is only when we allow the alternative way of Jesus to change us within, that we can offer a different way of being to those around us. But, once we have done the work of receiving deliverance from our own sin, we become those who radiate the grace and love of God, and we are able to bring liberation to others just by being the Christ-followers we are called to be.

This week our meditations lead us to confront and heal the evil in our own hearts.

Sunday 10 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 18:15-20

Reflection: Jesus was not naive about human nature. He knew that conflict would arise among his followers, and that it would threaten to destroy the new community he was building. So, right from the start he gave directions about how to handle disagreements. The first step is to address our differences privately. Unfortunately too many of us, instead of talking it through with those who have hurt us, choose to assassinate their character to other people, and leave the issue unresolved. Even when personal interaction fails to fix our

problems, we are to take a couple of objective witnesses to try and help us to resolve the dispute. Only if this doesn't work can we then involve the wider community in a formal process that seeks healing. The reason for involving objective observers is that they will show us not only what is wrong with the other person, but what is broken in our own hearts. This truth-telling is what ultimately helps us to forgive and reconcile.

Notice that when everything fails Jesus instructs us to treat our antagonists like "pagans" and tax-collectors. But remember how Jesus treated people like that - he loved them, welcomed them, and served them. So, even when conflicts remain, we are called to love and serve our antagonists! But, when we do manage to resolve our disputes and find unity, we experience a special sense of God's presence and a deeper power in prayer. This should be sufficient reason for us to work to make peace with one another.

With whom are you in conflict today? How can you acknowledge your part in the dispute and follow Jesus' process for reconciliation?

Practice for Today: The reason we are taught to confess our sins in worship is so that we learn to confess our sins to one another. When we have wronged each other, the ability to admit it and apologise is the only thing that can bring healing. Today, whenever you hurt another person, however unintentionally, be quick to apologise and seek healing.

Breath-Prayer for Today: In my disputes with others, O God, teach me to be quick to apologise and quick to forgive.

Monday 11 September 2017

Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-17

Reflection: It might be tempting to read this section of the first letter of Peter as an invitation passively to accept the status quo in our world. But that is certainly not the intention of the writer. On the contrary, the writer of this letter seeks to encourage the believers to live the Jesus way in the midst of a hostile society, demonstrating through their behaviour and attitudes that God's Reign is among them, and that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. But, in order to let this message speak through their lives, followers of Jesus need to ensure that they live in such a way that no one can accuse them of

evil. They are to reflect the grace and love of Christ to their neighbours, so that every person with whom they interact is drawn to honour God. The believers are also to respect (not necessarily agree) with human authority, in order to silence any accusations of trying to stir up trouble. The freedom of submitting to the lordship of Jesus is not to be used as an excuse for evil, but as a motivation for treating all people as beloved children of God.

It is sad that Christians sometimes demand special treatment because of their faith. It is sad that Christians sometimes treat people of other faiths, or of no faith, with little respect, but get upset when followers of Christ are not respected. It is sad that believers are often seen to be trying to impose their beliefs, values, and standards on other people, with no thought about the needs or struggles of others. But, if we are truly to reflect the grace of God to the world, we need to remove these selfish, self-centred attitudes from our hearts, and treat others with respect and kindness. Even when we disagree, we are to do so in an attitude of respect and reconciliation. This applies to our neighbours and to our leaders. Our governments will often get it wrong, and they may even be corrupt, but it is not our judgement that brings change, it is our commitment to stand up for integrity and justice in ways that are firm but kind, challenging but respectful.

How can you treat your neighbours and leaders with respect today?

Practice for Today: The simple act of listening is one of the most respectful gifts we can offer to anyone. When we resist our urge to judge or commentate, and open ourselves to the other person's experience and perspectives, we often find insights that we would have missed. Even when we resist those who abuse power, listening gives us the wisdom we need to speak with authority and with God's grace. Today, try to slow down and listen more carefully.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I listen to those around me, O God, give me the wisdom and grace to respond as you would.

Tuesday 12 September 2017

Reading: Psalm 119:65-72

Reflection: Today's reading from Psalm 119 describes a lovely transition in the life of the writer. In the past he was prone to go his

own way until God disciplined him, but over time he learned God's ways to the point that he could confidently proclaim that he followed God's word closely. Yet he knew that he still had work to do, and so he prayed that God would teach him God's decrees, which are the source of good judgement and knowledge. This Psalmist had learned that the evil in our hearts is only removed through consistent work, and through a partnership between us and God. This is especially true in those times when we face trials or persecution, because those are the moments when we are most tempted to adopt the same destructive methods as those who hurts us.

The most surprising element of this Psalm is when the writer acknowledges that even his suffering was good for him because it focussed his attention on God's instructions. While God does not bring suffering upon us, God is always keen to turn our suffering into a source of goodness and life. It may be that we sometimes need suffering to make us open and attentive enough to hear what God is trying to say. As C.S Lewis put it: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains."

How can you be more attentive to allowing God's ways to transform you? How can you allow your suffering to help you in this process?

Practice for Today: In today's reading the Psalmist recognised the value of suffering to change his heart. But, the attitude of the Psalm is one of praise. God's presence and grace had been at work in the Psalmist's life and he had seen this, and so he responded in praise, which, in turn, opened him further to the work of God. Today allow your praises to open you the work of God in your heart and life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your gracious work which changes my heart a little more each day.

Wednesday 13 September 2017

Reading: Leviticus 16:1-5, 20-28

Reflection: Aaron's sons had stepped seriously out of line, and had paid the price. The idea was that God's holiness destroyed sin, and so any sinner that entered God's presence was automatically killed. Note that the idea that we "live and move and have our being" in God was not yet understood. Nevertheless, God wanted to connect with God's people and so their wickedness needed to be dealt with

somehow. This brings us to the instructions concerning the scapegoat which we read today. The sins of the people were transferred to the goat through the laying on of hands. This goat was then sent out into the wilderness to perish, carrying the people's sins away. In some parts of the New Testament the scapegoat is viewed as a prophecy of Christ's work on our behalf.

Unfortunately, though, our evil hearts have found other ways to use the principle of the scapegoat. We have learned that we can feel better about ourselves, without doing anything to change, if we project what we despise and fear on to another person and group. Then we ostracise or accuse or condemn these others as the source of all that is wrong with the world. We have done this with people of other races or religions, with those who dress or think differently from us, with gay people, poor people, rich people, or powerful people. The list is endless. But, such scapegoating never removes the evil in our hearts – it only perpetuates it. What we need, instead, is to own our sin and to allow God to transform it so that we can become our best selves. Only then can we find healing, and stop adding our brokenness to the cycle of scapegoating in the world.

Who are you tempted to scapegoat today? How can you stop doing this and deal with your own sin, instead?

Practice for Today: Scapegoating is only possible when we refuse to do the work of mindful self-reflection. When we avoid trying to understand our own motives and actions, and when we make assumptions about the motives and actions of others, it is easy to blame "them" for all that is wrong. But, this is not the Jesus way. When we choose, instead, to make time to reflect on our lives, and to face what needs to change in us, healing is possible and we opt out of the blame game. Today, make time for reflective meditation and let it lead you to healing.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I examine myself, O God, may your Spirit reveal what must change and lead me to healing.

Thursday 14 September 2017

Reading: 1 John 3:11-16

Reflection: If we are serious about overcoming the evil in our hearts and in the world, we will have to learn the power of forgiveness. Evil

cannot be removed from us until we have become experts at receiving and giving forgiveness. This truth is at the heart of this Sunday's worship. Today's reading shows us how forgiveness is possible. Real love is shown, the writer tells us, in the way Jesus gave up his life for us. God's forgiveness and healing were made possible because of Christ's capacity for love. If God had not loved us to this extent, we would be without hope and without the possibility of forgiveness and communion with God.

But, the link between love and forgiveness is not just seen in how God deals with us. It is also meant to shine through our relationships with others. As Christ loved us and gave himself for us, so we are to love and give ourselves for each other. Notice that this love is not dependent on how others treat us. Even though we may be hated, we are not to respond with hate, but with love. Only when we have learned to do this have we really begun to live the way of Jesus. And only then can we overcome the destructive attitudes and actions within us, and in the world around us.

Who needs you to love them enough to forgive them today?

Practice for Today: When we are treated badly, we may find it difficult to love the one who hurt us. But, if we remember that love is not primarily a feeling but a way of living, we can respond to hurt with grace, compassion, and quiet service, even though we may feel anger or even hatred. And, if we can commit to loving actions, we often find that our feelings change to align with what we do. Today, let your actions express love toward everyone you encounter.

Breath-Prayer for Today: No matter how I am treated, no matter what I may feel, O God, I choose to act in love as you always do.

Friday 15 September 2017

Reading: Psalm 103:1-13

Reflection: The first few verses of this Psalm are better known from older translations: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me bless his holy name!..." But the message remains the same. The Psalmist is moved to exuberant praise because of God's mercy and forgiveness. God's love and goodness have been such that the Psalmist feels like his youthful strength has been renewed. This grace of God flows from the nature of God, which is compassionate

and infinitely loving. God's anger does not come quickly, nor does it last long. Rather God's greatest desire is to heal, rescue, forgive and restore. If our image of God is anything other than this gracious merciful parent, we have not heard the message of the Bible!

In the middle of this song of praise and thanksgiving, the writer adds a note about God's justice. God is especially concerned for those who are treated unfairly and seeks to bring justice where injustice oppresses and imprisons people. The example the Psalmist gives of God's commitment to justice is the liberation of the people of Israel under Moses, which he describes as a revelation of God's character. This resonates with the picture of God that shines through the whole Bible - God seeks justice and mercy for all. This means that, in our own lives, if we seek to become like God, we also need to be committed to justice. In our daily dealings with others, we are called to be fair, kind, and considerate. In our participation in society we are called to side with the most vulnerable, and with those who suffer the most.

To whom can you bring God's grace and restoration through simple acts of justice, kindness and compassion today?

Practice for Today: Kindness costs nothing, but can make a big difference in people's lives. When we make a point of being welcoming to the people we encounter each day, using their name if we can, and treating them fairly and with consideration, this simple attitude makes our part of the world a little kinder and more just, and the ripples spread out far beyond what we can imagine. Make a point of being welcoming and kind today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: You have welcomed me into your love and treated me with great kindness, O God, so I seek to bless others as you have blessed me.

Saturday 16 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 6:7-15

Reflection: It is important not to "over-spiritualise" Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, especially when it comes to prayer. Jesus does not speak of prayer as a kind of magic wand that we can use to manipulate God and the world according to our desires. Rather, he calls us to pray with simplicity and with an openness to

being changed to conform with God's values and priorities. This is why he instructs his followers to avoid praying like those who think long, repetitive prayers will get them what they want.

The Lord's prayer is a simple framework into which we can place our own prayers. It begins with an affirmation of the God who is the focus of our prayers and the source of our faith. Then it invites God's Reign to be revealed in our world and our hearts. Once we have prayed like this, putting the right priorities in place, we can then move on to bringing our needs to God. There are really only three things we need to ask for: enough sustenance to get us through the day, forgiveness to keep our relationships strong, and the ability to resist the evil in our own hearts and in the world. If we know these three blessings, we have all we need.

But, forgiveness lies at the heart of it all. When we are reconciled with God and others, everything else falls into place. But, when we refuse to let forgiveness heal us, everything is affected by our destructive bitterness - including our relationship with God. This is the meaning of the last two verses in today's reading.

How can you live by the Lord's Prayer today?

Practice for Today: The Lord's Prayer is a simple, but very powerful, gift. When we learn to use it as a framework, not just for our conversation with God, but for our entire lives, we soon find that God's presence and priorities filter through everything - which is, of course, the goal of following Jesus. Today carry the Lord's Prayer with you in everything you do and let it guide your life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I honour you and pray to you, O God, may your Reign come and your will be done in me.

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