

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
17 - 23 September 2017

Thought for the Week:

God's gift of forgiveness is priceless and life-giving. But, somehow living up to what we say is a lot harder. While we may acknowledge that God forgives us, we often struggle to forgive ourselves. And, while we may acknowledge that God forgives those who have hurt us, we often find it very difficult to extend forgiveness to others. We define justice largely in terms of retribution, and so we feel that forgiveness lets the perpetrator off the hook. We have also learned that our pain can give us a sense of power, and so we become reluctant to release our hurts and move on. Yet, while we nurse our wounds, the ones against whom we hold our grudges often continue with their lives, unaware of our anger and unaffected by our unforgiveness. In the end, the only ones we hurt are ourselves.

But, the call to forgive goes even deeper. The word for forgiveness is related, in the Gospels, to the idea of indebtedness. There is a direct correlation between owing a financial debt and needing forgiveness. Yet, the idea of indebtedness goes deeper still. As followers of Christ we are called to live with a continual sense of indebtedness toward others. We are always to feel that we owe our friends, our neighbours, and even our enemies, the debt of love. And it is this awareness of the love we owe to all people that should direct us to forgive whatever debts they may owe us, or whatever hurts they may have inflicted on us. The challenge is to believe that it is the restorative justice of love that truly leads to life.

This week we meditate on God's forgiveness and the call for us to be people of forgiveness.

Sunday 17 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflection: When Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive another person seven times, he was going well beyond the requirements of the law. But, Jesus moved forgiveness beyond any attempt to

measure and keep score. He called his disciples to forgive seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven) – which is not about a specific number, but is a call to never give up on forgiving. The parable in today's reading really drives the point home. The servant who is forgiven by the king should have been eager to extend grace to the neighbour who owed him so much less. But, his only concern was for himself. His inability to forgive those around him meant that even though he may have been released from his debt, he remained imprisoned by his need to keep score.

This parable makes a connection between forgiveness and financial debt. In our materialist, consumerist world, we often imprison ourselves in financial disputes, and in our addiction to more. But, the parable also applies to debts that are not financial. When anyone hurts us we view this as a debt of justice, and we want retribution in order to feel honoured, respected, and powerful again. However, in the process of fighting for justice, we often lose our souls and destroy more than the ones who hurt us ever did. The gift of forgiveness is that it frees us from destructive patterns and releases us to live without constant reference to what has hurt us – it lets us, more than others, off the hook.

Where do you need to choose forgiveness today?

Practice for Today: Whenever we bring our confessions to God in worship, we hear the words of absolution in response. This is to remind us that God always chooses forgiveness and restoration over retribution. Then, as we allow this to teach and change us, we learn to make forgiveness our habitual choice. Today, practice choosing forgiveness and let it set you free.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you forgive me, even though I don't deserve it, O God, so I choose to forgive those who have hurt me.

Monday 18 September 2017

Reading: Psalm 133

Reflection: Broken relationships are costly. They rob us of resources – physical, emotional, and material – and bring great chaos and insecurity into our lives. But, when relationships are strong and healthy, our lives are filled with great joy, energy, creativity, and peace. This is why today's Psalm is so exuberant in

its celebration of unity among God's people. This Psalm was a pilgrimage Psalm, which means that it would have been sung as the people processed to the Temple for worship. The writer knew that God was pleased when God's worshipping people were united in heart and spirit, and that the result would be an "anointing" of blessing, like the oil used to anoint the high priest.

Notice how the Psalm ends – God's blessing on those who are united is the gift of life everlasting. In contrast in the first letter to the Corinthians, the writer declares that the disunity among the believers has caused some to be sick and some to die (1 Corinthians 11:17-30)! It's a simple equation: unity brings life, but disunity robs us of life. The question is how we are to maintain unity with our sisters and brothers who are so very different from us. How do we stay united when we disagree about so much? The answer is that we learn to forgive on an on going basis, and that we do not base our unity on agreement, but on love. Nothing less than generous love and forgiveness can bring, and keep, us together.

How can you allow your generosity in love and forgiveness to unite you with your Christian sisters and brothers today?

Practice for Today: Even though we will often be hurt if we choose to be part of a community of faith, the alternative is much worse. We cannot learn to forgive, and find the life it offers, unless we make a commitment to do the work of being united with others. Today, make a choice to commit to a community and to do the work to be united with your companions in faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I commit to find unity with my sisters and brothers, O God, make me generous in love and forgiveness.

Tuesday 19 September 2017

Reading: Romans 14:13-15:2

Reflection: In our society, we are often told to ignore what others think and to just "be ourselves". But, there is a deep flaw in this thinking, because it ignores the way we are shaped by our relationships, and it denies the deep impact that our behaviour has on others. The Bible is clear that even when we find nothing wrong with what we do, if it hurts another person, or hinders their spiritual growth, we should be willing to stop.

As we explore forgiveness this week, it may seem strange to be talking about how our behaviour affects others. But, few of us would consider that we may need to be forgiven for ignoring how our actions may harm others because of *their* weakness, not our own. Few of us may be willing to change actions that we feel are right, because others feel they are wrong. And few of us would consider that we may need to forgive others for the way their weakness restricts our freedom. But, when we seek to follow Jesus, we are called into community, and this means that we have to learn to negotiate our differences. It means that we need to be considerate of each other's views, and we need to be willing to adapt what we do in order to avoid harming or offending those around us.

What do you need to change in your life out of consideration for others today?

Practice for Today: It is hard to know how our actions and attitudes affect those around us unless we are willing to listen and hear their struggles, criticisms, and questions. Listening like this is not easy, and it can be painful. But, it also offers great healing and reconciliation. Today, work hard to listen to those around you, and try to act with consideration for their feelings and perspectives.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Teach me, Jesus, to be willing to serve you by treating others with grace and consideration.

Wednesday 20 September 2017

Reading: Mark 11:20-25

Reflection: It was not the season for this poor fig tree to bear fruit, yet Jesus cursed it for bearing no figs. This seems pointless and uncharacteristically destructive. But, the story is divided into two parts with the cleansing of the Temple in the middle. Remember that the fig tree is sometimes used in Scripture as a symbol of God's people. Jesus cleared the Temple because, in this place where worship of God should have been reflected in justice and compassion, the poor were being fleeced by a corrupt system of religious exploitation. So, by cleansing the Temple, Jesus was "cursing" what Israel had become. The fig tree was a parable of this.

But, when the disciples responded in awe to what they saw, Jesus taught them about faith. When we believe in God and God's ways,

then amazing things become possible. Moving mountains does not have to happen dramatically or supernaturally. Sometimes the miracle is in the perseverance and faith to keep moving a stone at a time until the whole mountain is moved. But, this kind of commitment is difficult when our energies are absorbed by petty grievances and grudges against one another. That's why Jesus connects the effectiveness of our prayers with our ability to forgive. When we make our relationships right with God and with one another, all sorts of things become possible – even overcoming injustice and evil.

What mountains do you need to move in your world? How can forgiveness strengthen the relationships that will make it possible?

Practice for Today: Faith is quite simply how we choose to think, live, and interact each day. Your life is what your faith has made it. This means that each day we can choose to allow our faith in Christ to guide us, and we can enjoy the restored relationships, and hopeful vision of a new world that Jesus gives. Today, reaffirm your choice to have faith in the way of Jesus – not just in word or thought, but in action.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I choose to believe in your ways, O God, and to let this faith guide every part of my life.

Thursday 21 September 2017

Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:1-4

Reflection: It can be very painful and difficult when we face moments of confrontation. There are really two big temptations we need to avoid when this happens. The first is to write the other person off as evil or to simply cut them out of our hearts and lives. The second is to become self-righteous and fixed in our view, refusing to hear any alternative or to consider that we may be wrong. But, even when we remain committed to love our antagonists and we work to ensure that we are not just imposing our own ideas on others, we may still need to challenge them. This was the situation in which Paul found himself.

After three letters (of which we only have two) and two visits, there were still those who doubted his calling and credentials as God's appointed apostle. There were still those who sought to undermine his ministry. He had tried to reconcile with them. He had met with

them and worked to find common ground. He had instructed the church and served them with great love. But, in the end, he had to stand strong against those who were destroying the Church. But, even as he did this, his love was unchanged, and he made certain that his motives were not to impose his own ideas, but to speak only the word of Christ. It was this servant heart, and this submission to Jesus' way that gave Paul the authority to confront the trouble-makers. And sometimes, the most gracious, forgiving and loving thing we can do is challenge others when their actions bring harm to God's people.

How can you ensure that you are submitted to Christ and working to love those with whom you disagree today?

Practice for Today: Sometimes the best way to resolve our disputes is not through words but actions. Paul confidently declared that he would prove that it was Christ speaking through him - which he would certainly have done through loving actions. When our lives reflect the compassion, grace, justice and humility of Jesus, that's often enough to confront those who speak ill of us. Today, allow your actions of love to speak more than your words.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I face criticism, O God, may my love, humility and service speak the truth about my life.

Friday 22 September 2017

Reading: Psalm 145:1-8

Reflection: On Sunday the Gospel reading is the parable of the workers who are hired throughout the day but paid the same wages. It's a story of shocking generosity, and a challenge to our addiction to meritocracy. Today's Psalm prepares us to meditate on this parable by inviting us into a grand celebration of God's grace and love. After beginning by declaring God's goodness and greatness, the Psalm continues by remembering God's mighty acts, God's miracles, and God's awe-inspiring deeds. When a biblical writer uses three different ways to say the same thing, we must pay special attention! And the message we are invited to hear and take into our hearts is this: God is always active on behalf of mortal humans, whom God loves. Finally, this section ends by affirming God's mercy, compassion, and unending love.

Notice two things about this Psalm today. Firstly, part of the invitation is not just to praise God, but to share what we have experienced with others. Generosity is not just about giving money. When we have experienced God's grace and goodness in some way, we can be generous by inviting others into the joy and freedom of it. Secondly, notice how everyone shares in the story of God's generosity so freely (verse 7). There is no competition and no envy toward those who seem "more blessed" than others. Rather, whatever blessing is received is given to the whole community and is shared with all. If only we could all learn to be this generous with our blessings!

What blessings do you enjoy today? How can you share this with others, while avoiding any feelings of envy toward those who may seem "more blessed" than you?

Practice for Today: The discipline of giving is a simple but effective way to learn the way of generosity. When we recognise that we have something to give, whether time, abilities, or resources, we lose our scarcity mentality and learn to enjoy what we have. And when we share our blessing, the enjoyment increases exponentially. Today share whatever you can with as many people as you can.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I celebrate your amazing goodness, O God, and joyfully share it with others.

Saturday 23 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 19:23-30

Reflection: It is very important to remember that in Matthew's Gospel, most of the time that Jesus speaks about "the Kingdom of heaven" he's not talking about what happens after we die. He's referring to what the other Gospel writers call the "Kingdom of God" which is about a different way of being in this world. So, when Jesus says it is hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven, he's speaking about how difficult it is for those who have much to embrace God's way of simplicity, sacrificial giving, and service of the least.

Those who are wealthy (and that means pretty much all of us who read this because we have access to the internet) are invested, at least to some extent, in human systems of money, power and

pleasure. Our comfort, security, and even our identity very easily get caught up in the values of our society, and we begin to judge our worth (and that of others) by how much, and what, we own. This means that to change and begin to trust in God's values and the Christ-following community that seeks to live them out together, can be very scary. But, it's not impossible, if we are willing to let go of addiction to our "stuff" and base our lives on the priorities of the Kingdom.

What makes it hard for you to embrace the simplicity, sacrifice and service of God's Reign today? How can you release it a little more in order to receive more of God's life?

Practice for Today: Simplicity is a discipline that can be nurtured. While it includes the act of giving, it also calls us to attitudes and actions that help us to release our addictive tendencies and find freedom in less. One simple act that helps us in this journey is learning to enjoy things without owning them - like public spaces, beautiful works of art, or amazing wonders in nature. Today, identify as many things as you can that you don't own but are able to enjoy.

Breath-Prayer for Today: For the abundance and simplicity of your Reign, and all the joy it brings me, I give thanks, O God.

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