

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:
24 – 30 September 2017

Thought for the Week:

One of the ways that grace can be understood is as God's undeserved generosity. The key in all our dealings with God is that word "undeserved". It is easy to slip into thinking that health, wealth and happiness are a deserved reward from God given because we are particularly spiritual or "good". It is just as easy to fall into judgement of those who are sickly, poor or suffering because we believe that their struggles are God's judgement on some sin in their life. Although this view is sometimes expressed in the Old Testament, it is never seen in Jesus' teaching.

Both "blessing" and "curses" are simple realities of living in this world. Sometimes we bring them on ourselves, and sometimes they just happen to us, but they are not the results of a fickle God handing out rewards and punishments. But, one thing is clear from the Scriptures: when we are "blessed", it is never for ourselves alone, but in order for us to be a blessing to others. And when others seem to be "more blessed" than we are, we are not to judge them or question God's justice. We are to give thanks for what we have received, while rejoicing in the good fortune of those around us.

This week we seek to release our feelings of deservedness and undeservedness and learn to celebrate and share in whatever way we can - especially with those who are suffering.

Sunday 24 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

Reflection: Today's parable is one of the toughest for us to receive. That's because we are rooted in a culture of meritocracy in which we believe that everyone should get what they deserve. Most of us would be extremely angry at an employer who paid the same wage to those who worked for one hour as those who worked for an entire day. Like the workers in Jesus' parable we would protest, and possibly even reject or do violence to those who had received an

"undue reward". The problem is that we bring this same thinking into our faith. We believe that if we're good, if we do our best to follow Jesus and be faithful to what God has called us to do, then God should bless us and make sure no tragedy strikes us. Then, when we do experience hardship, we get angry with God. Or when we see others who, in our opinion are undeserving, receiving some great blessing, we also get angry with God.

This reveals that this parable is about us, and it challenges our need to balance the scales. With God our meritocracy is meaningless, because everything is grace. God's love cannot be reduced or expanded according to what we do. God's love is always infinite, and it is given freely to those who follow Jesus and to those who don't - to those whom we consider worthy and to those whom we don't. If this offends us, or makes us question whether it's worth following Jesus, we have not yet understood God's grace and love.

Where, in your heart, are you offended by God's grace? How can you release your need to "balance the scales" today?

Practice for Today: One of the ways we can release our need always to compare "blessings" is to practice thanksgiving. When we take the time to really count our blessings, we don't have time to count the blessings of others and balance the scales. Today allow the discipline of thanksgiving to release you from the prison of meritocracy.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that though I can never deserve your grace, you give it to me freely.

Monday 25 September 2017

Reading: Romans 16:1-16

Reflection: We can read today's passage from Paul's letter to the Romans as nothing more than a list of names, or we can read it as a celebration of God's grace. We may not know who all these people are, but it is clear from Paul's words that he held every one of them very dear. This list includes Jews and Gentiles, men and women, couples and singles and families. Some had been believers before Paul had come to Christ, and some were leaders in the Church. Some may well have had good reason to wonder why Paul, and not they, had been chosen by God to be an apostle. But, there is no

evidence of jealousy or competition here. Certainly, from Paul's side, there is nothing but appreciation and thankfulness for all of these companions in faith. God's grace had touched each of these people and they all knew it and celebrated it together.

When we read lists of thanksgiving like this it can lead us to consider the people in our own lives who support us, work alongside us, and teach us. It can remind us of the rich blessing of relationships that we enjoy, and how much life and grace God brings into our lives through other people. It may even make us aware of how seldom we really stop to say thank you to our friends and companions for the gift of grace they are to us.

Who are the people who bring undeserved grace and blessing into your life today? How can you show them your appreciation?

Practice for Today: As much as we enjoy the support and love of friends, family and companions in faith, we are called to bring grace into their lives as well. There is no better way to show appreciation to someone than to support and serve them. Today, do something unexpected and generous to someone who makes your life better.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I celebrate the people who bring grace into my life, O God, and I commit to be a channel of grace to them.

Tuesday 26 September 2017

Reading: Genesis 28:10-17

Reflection: If we are committed to the idea that God only uses those who are worthy, those who are especially good, gifted, and faithful, then we probably need to read the Bible again. The list of people that God used to achieve God's purposes is filled with outcasts, failures, and "sinners". Today's reading is just another glimpse at how God chooses those who do not deserve it and then works in and through them. Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau because he had lied to his father, impersonated Esau and stolen his brother's blessing. These are not the qualifications we would look for in a servant of God! But, God met with Jacob as he slept, and gave him a vision of God's glory. Then God repeated the promise that God had given to Jacob's grandfather Abraham, that his descendants would fill the earth and that all nations would be blessed through them. In addition, God gave Jacob a personal

promise of protection and of God's presence. Jacob was amazed and moved by this visitation, but he never really lost his tendency to trickery and deceit. And, God used him anyway.

In a meritocracy, Jacob should never have received the blessing of his father, let alone that of God. But, God does not work according to our systems of status, achievement, or privilege. Rather God works through those through whom God's grace can most clearly be seen - the "undeserving". When we look at Jacob we can see that it was all grace - Jacob did nothing, and had nothing, that could earn his place in God's plan. This is both liberating and challenging. It is liberating because it frees us from a legalistic striving to always earn God's approval and presence. But, it is challenging because it means we have to throw out all our systems of measurement, all our rules for who is in and who is out, and all our pride in our spiritual achievements.

How can you let go of any ideas of "worthiness" in your own life and relationships, and open yourself to the pure grace of God today?

Practice for Today: Grace is never forced. It can only be received. But, sometimes, in order to receive it, we need to identify the things that get in the way. This is what confession is for. Today, acknowledge any ideas or attitudes that keep you from receiving and sharing grace and ask God to heal you.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I live according to merit and not according to grace, O God, forgive me and heal me.

Wednesday 27 September 2017

Reading: Matthew 18:1-5

Reflection: Jesus often used children as the model of those who reflect God's priorities and values. Children live purely by grace. They are too small, weak and vulnerable to care for themselves. They do not earn the love of their parents, and they do not earn the food and shelter they receive. This is why social problems like poverty and AIDS always hurt children the most - they have no defenses or capacity to carry themselves through. Children always rely on others to keep them healthy, comfortable, and safe. In this way, if we want to understand what it means to live by grace, children are the prophets who must teach us.

But, it takes great humility to return to this childlike life of trust and grace. We are constantly taught to “stand on our own feet” and to be “independent”. As adults we cannot survive in the world unless we learn the skills of looking after ourselves and taking responsibility for our own lives. Jesus is not telling us to stop being grown ups and revert to the dependence and irresponsibility of children. But, he is inviting us to recognise that it doesn’t all depend on us. There is a presence at work in our world that can sustain us and strengthen us, and we can learn to trust this. Also, there is more to our value than just what we can achieve. And so, we must learn humility, acceptance and an openness to grace that not only frees us to step off the treadmill of constant striving, but also teaches us to love and welcome others for who they are, not just what they have achieved.

How can you adopt a more open, childlike attitude today?

Practice for Today: When we make time to meditate on God’s character and acts through praise, we inevitably grow in our ability to trust God and place our lives in the context of God’s bigger purpose. This invites us into a humble receptiveness to God’s grace and presence. Today allow your praises to lead you into a more childlike faith.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, and I humble myself to receive your grace and love.

Thursday 28 September 2017

Reading: James 4:11-16

Reflection: When we pride ourselves on our achievements - whether spiritual or otherwise - we inevitably begin to feel that we are in control of our lives. We make our plans with a sense of superiority over those who are not as “good” as we are, and we tend to look down on and judge others. But, if we are honest, we have to admit that our achievements always come through many gifts of grace that we have received from others. Perhaps we were born into a family with resources to give us a good education. Or perhaps we were connected with someone who could help to advance our career. Or maybe, we have been the recipients of unexpected kindness just when we’ve needed it. No one ever achieves anything in this life alone. We all need each other, which is why we need to

learn to be less critical of one another, and more gracious.

As we will see on Sunday, when we get addicted to our own superiority, we usually end up missing the new thing, the unexpected grace, the surprising opportunity when it arises - and it always does. And then we also get upset when others, whom we consider to be unworthy, do manage to embrace a new opportunity for grace and life. But, the way of Jesus is about enjoying what we have received to the full, and then also celebrating when others are “blessed”. It is about living with as much responsibility and discipline as we can, while also opening to God’s grace and to unexpected gifts. And when this faithfulness and humility connect in our lives, we find a deeper peace, and a more gracious attitude to carry with us through our lives.

How can you avoid the temptation to criticise others, and embrace the way of humble faithfulness today?

Practice for Today: When we pray for those around us it is much harder to criticise them. Our prayers may even show us where God wants us to serve others in faithful humility, and this can lead us to actions that honour God and bring wholeness to others. Today, whenever you are tempted, for whatever reason, to look down on someone, take a moment to pray for them.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I pray for those around me, O God, show me how to serve them in humble faithfulness to your grace.

Friday 29 September 2017

Reading: Acts 13:32-41

Reflection: While many first century Jews believed in a resurrection of all people at the end of time, the idea that God’s Messiah was raised from death in their lifetime was a whole new concept. But, this was the centre of Paul’s preaching, because it was the heart of his Gospel. Death could not overcome Christ because in him God’s Reign had broken into the world and was renewing all things. But, in order to get people to hear this surprising message, the apostle had to show that it had been written about in the Old Testament. So, he quoted from the Psalms and from the prophet Habakkuk to support his case. The latter quote was a challenge for his hearers to be amazed, to release the temptation to mock Paul’s preaching

because it was new, and to open themselves to God's new work among them.

In the same way, in this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus challenged the religious leaders for their resistance to his message and spoke of how those who had previously been rejected were now finding their way into God's Reign. This message of grace was so radical that it took great faith and humility to receive it - for those in Christ's day, in Paul's day, and in ours. Grace is always new, it always creates opportunities for those who seem to have none, and it is always offensive because it challenges our need to draw lines, create meritocracies, and divide the world into those who are in and those who aren't.

How can you open yourself to God's new, surprising, and even offensive, work of grace in your world today?

Practice for Today: When we welcome those who are usually rejected, this is a sign of God's Reign among us. But, we can only do this when we know that God's grace is unrestrained and freely available to all. And this means, we must let go of any idea that we are better, more worthy, or somehow closer to God. All that matters is that God's love extends to all of us, and seeks to reach out to others through us. Today, let God's love and grace flow through you in the act of welcoming everyone you meet with kindness and dignity.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As your grace has welcomed me into your love, O God, so I welcome all others in your name.

Saturday 30 September 2017

Reading: Ezekiel 18:19-24

Reflection: Sometimes it is so clear that the Bible reflects a growing understanding of God. This means that what is written in the earliest parts is often superseded by new insights of later writers. And the direction of growth is always toward increasing grace, inclusivity, and compassion. Today's reading is an example of this movement in the Bible, especially when we connect it with tomorrow's theme in the Lectionary.

In the early teachings of Scripture, it was stated that God punished

children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation (see Exodus 34:6-7). Yet today the prophet Ezekiel, said something that completely contradicted this early belief - God does not punish children for the parents' sins. This was a huge step in how people understood God's nature and grace! But, the Gospels went even further.

In the preaching of Jesus, God does not just refuse to punish children for their parents' sins; God does not punish anyone! Jesus made it clear that it is our decision whether our lives are connected with God or not. Jesus welcomed everyone who received this message of grace whether they were "sinners" or not. And he did not judge those who rejected his message - although he did make it clear that there would be consequences (not punishments) for refusing to follow the way of grace and compassion. The key statement in today's reading is verse 23 - God does not like to see wicked (or any) people die. God's grace is offered to ensure that no one has to.

How can you help to bring life to others by extending God's grace and love to them today?

Practice for Today: It is common for us to speak of treating others the way they treat us. This "tit-for-tat" view sounds so wise until we really examine it. When we allow the behaviour of others to determine how we treat them, there is no room for grace - and so it cannot be the way of Jesus. Jesus' way calls us to treat others according to God's grace, not according to their actions, or our opinion of them. This means that we should serve and respect everyone we encounter. Today, try to serve every person from an attitude of grace.

Breath-Prayer for Today: You have treated me with kindness that I don't deserve, O God, and so I extend that grace to others.

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