



# Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:  
04 – 10 October 2020

## Thought For The Week:

The financial and political systems of our world are said to be structured for the common good, but there is a lot of evidence that suggests that these systems are strongly biased toward those who are wealthy, connected, and powerful. Those who have learned to use the “rules of the game” to their advantage are able to manipulate our systems to their own gain, while those who are outside the networks of power suffer and are often disadvantaged. This reality was no different in any of the eras in which the Bible was written.

However, throughout history there have been groups of people who have challenged the bias and inequality in the world’s systems. There have been those who have exposed the “gatekeepers” who regulate who gets ‘in’ and who is left ‘out, and they have sought to live by different values and priorities. Of course, Jesus was the most significant of these prophets, and he called his followers to embrace his alternative way of living, in which the only law was the law of love, and in which everyone belongs. Now as we seek to follow Jesus both personally and together, we are called to bear the fruit of God’s Reign in our own lives – the fruit of compassion, simplicity, inclusivity, grace, generosity, and justice.

This week we meditate on the contrast between Jesus’ way and the ways of our human systems, and we seek to live according to the values of God’s Reign even as we participate in the systems of our society. This is challenging, but it is definitely worth the effort!

# Sunday 04 October 2020

## READ:

Matthew 21:33-46

## REFLECT:

Jesus was not naïve about how the world works. He knew that those who are given positions of influence over others have the capacity to do great good or great harm. Often it is not that leaders deliberately intend to hurt others. It's just that they become so caught up in their own self-interest that they end up doing damage as a result. You don't have to look far to see this dynamic at work in our world, even as it was in Jesus' world. But, it's not just those in formal positions of leadership who need to hear Jesus' message. If we have friends or family who respect our opinion, or if we teach Sunday School or lead a Bible study, or if we have our own children to look after, we are leaders. In fact, there is no person who is not a leader in some way to some other person. This means that we all need to be careful about the kind of influence we exert over others.

In Jesus' parable, the tenant farmers, who represent the religious leaders, keep the fruit of the vineyard to themselves. In other words, they refuse to share what they have received, and they use their position for themselves. We do this when we manipulate others for our own sakes, or when we refuse to use our influence for the best interests of others. When we do this, we cease to live as participants in God's Reign, and we end up being contributors to injustice rather than givers of life.

Are there any ways that you use your influence over others for your own benefit? How can you use your leadership, however small, to serve those around you today?

## DO:

Whenever we are in a position of influence over others, it is always tempting to operate from a position of knowing and telling what is best for them. But, the best leadership invites others to grow into their best selves in their own way. And this means that listening is one of the most important practices of leadership. Today, make a special effort to listen to those in whose lives you exercise a measure of influence.

## PRAY:

As I seek to influence others for the sake of your Reign, O God, teach me to listen and serve.

Monday 05 October 2020

## READ:

1 Peter 2:4-10

## REFLECT:

Today's reading uses an image drawn from the Old Testament – that of the stone, rejected by the builders, which becomes the cornerstone, and which causes people to stumble and fall. In yesterday's reading, Jesus referred to himself as this stone, as does today's writer. Jesus, who was rejected for proclaiming God's Reign, has been given great honour by God. Although those who chase after power, wealth, and fame often stumble when they encounter Jesus' alternative way of simplicity, sacrifice and service, those who are willing to risk living according to the values and priorities of God's Reign discover life, joy and belonging in the family of God.

The writer of today's letter speaks of us as living stones built together into a spiritual temple. This is one of the toughest parts of following Jesus. The way of Jesus is always a shared way. It is always an invitation into relationship, into community, into finding our place in the people of God. That means that we allow others to influence our lives, even as we influence theirs. It means that the needs and concerns of others must impact our choices, even as they are called to serve and consider us. But it also means that, when we need the strength, support and care of others, it is there for us, even as we care for and support them.

How do you feel about belonging in the people of God like this? How can you give yourself more fully to sharing life with others?

## DO:

Once we have recognised that we cannot follow Jesus or live to the full alone, we realise that we need to learn to live well with others. This means becoming part of a community. One of the best practices to connect with others is to greet them with kindness and respect. Today, greet everyone you meet in this way.

## PRAY:

As you have welcomed me into your family, O God, so I welcome others into my heart and life.

Tuesday 06 October 2020

## READ:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

## REFLECT:

Today's reading is often understood as referring to a 'spiritual' reconciliation – being forgiven so we go to heaven when we die. But, two statements in this reading show that the apostle was challenging his readers to live lives of justice and compassion in this world. Firstly, he strongly links our reconciliation with God to our reconciliation with one another. This means that the new life to which he refers is about how we treat others in the context of our normal day-to-day living. Secondly, he speaks about how Jesus did not hold sin against people while he was in the world physically. So, while this may have an impact on what happens after we die, it certainly means that we can know a different, reconciled way of living, here and now through Christ.

Paul's challenge for us to live reconciled lives must lead us to ask how we are to do this. He teaches that Jesus did not hold sin against people. Rather he became an "offering for sin" - he absorbed sin into himself and gave his life, instead of retaliating and judging those who hurt him. In doing this he showed what God's Reign looks like and invited us to live the same way. This means that, in our own small way, we are called to absorb the evil that comes against us and respond not with retaliation but forgiveness, even when it hurts to a great degree. And as we follow Jesus' example in this way, we are "right with God" in that we live according to the values and priorities of God.

How can you be a minister of reconciliation in your world today?

## DO:

There can be no reconciliation without a willingness to forgive. This forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a choice to treat others, not according to

how they treat us, but according to the grace and forgiveness of God. Today, do your best to do the hard work of forgiving those who hurt you.

### PRAY:

As you have reconciled me to yourself, O God, so I seek to be a minister of reconciliation.

Wednesday 07 October 2020

### READ:

John 11:45-57

### REFLECT:

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the religious leaders began to plot against him in earnest. While they were certainly concerned for their own position and influence among the people, there was also a legitimate concern that the followers of Jesus would declare him the Messiah and start a revolution. The religious leaders knew that Rome would never tolerate that, and it would not end well for the people of Israel. But, their reaction to Jesus reveals two big flaws in the character and thinking of these religious leaders. Firstly, they clearly had not been listening to Jesus very well or they would have known that he was not interested in starting a violent, political revolution. And secondly, they believed that the solution to the 'problem' of Jesus was to kill him. In other words, they were trying to stop violence by using violence – which is always a futile strategy.

The writer of John's Gospel points out that the high priest prophesied that Jesus would die for the entire nation, and for all of God's children. Jesus willingly gave his life to create a different order in the midst of our world - one of peace, not violence, and of forgiveness not retaliation. In his death and resurrection Jesus revealed that evil can be overcome by love and justice, if we are only willing to pay the price. The challenge for us is to recognise the places in our lives where we are tempted to use violent means to achieve our goals (even if the violence is only in our words or attitudes to others), and to turn away from this violence and embrace Jesus' way of love, service, and self-giving.

Where do you need to reject manipulation or violence in your life today?

## DO:

When others hurt us, or when our loved ones follow a course that we believe will do them damage, it is tempting to respond with angry words, or manipulative actions, or even attempts to force them to our way of thinking. but, these strategies seldom, if ever, achieve good results. Today, try a different course - the choice to acknowledge and repent of the "violence" in your heart, and to seek a way of peace instead.

## PRAY:

Forgive me, O God, for the violence in my heart and the way it hurts me and those around me.

Thursday 08 October 2020

## READ:

1 Peter 5:1-5, 12-14

## REFLECT:

As we may see on Sunday, seeking to be people of peace and reconciliation does not mean that we never confront evil and injustice. We do need to confront anything that destroys and oppresses people. The question, though, is how this confrontation must happen. In today's reading, the writer confronts the potential for arrogance among God's people. He challenges those who are leaders to be servants, not overlords and to serve God by serving others. He also challenges those who are "followers" to be respectful of those in authority. The key phrase, though, is "serve each other in humility". It is only when we learn to live out our faith through this kind of humble service that we will really see God's Reign revealed among us.

The writer speaks of the church in 'Babylon' but this actually refers to the city of Rome – a place where Christians were persecuted for their faith. Yet, even in the face of this persecution, the writer assures his readers that God's grace is at work. Once we have learned to experience God's grace even in the toughest and most painful times, we are able to respond to others in grace. And then, even when we need to confront others as the writer did, we can do so with kindness, humility and love rather than aggression.

How can you serve others in humility today, even when it might mean confrontation?

**DO:**

Serving others means seeking the best for them. This means that we seek to do everything with the best interests of the other person at heart, being careful not to impose our agenda on them. Today, try to serve your friends, family and colleagues by humbly seeking their best.

**PRAY:**

Teach me, O God, to serve others as humbly as you have served me in Christ.

Friday 09 October 2020

**READ:**

James 4:4-10

**REFLECT:**

Some Christian teachers have viewed today's reading as a call to oppose and judge 'the world'. The idea is that, if we are not to be 'friends' with the world, we must be the world's enemies. It's not a long jump from here to believing that God hates and seeks to destroy the world. But, that's not what the writer of today's passage means. The Bible also uses the word 'world' in different ways. One way refers to the earth along with all the creatures and people in it. God loves this world infinitely. But the second way refers to the values, priorities, behaviours and systems that are dominant in human society and that create the kinds of injustice we see around us every day. It is this 'world that God opposes and that we must be careful not to befriend.

We cannot live by God's values and those of our society at the same time. That's because God's values are very different from those of human society. Instead of seeking power, God's Reign calls us to service. Instead of seeking to accumulate as much wealth as possible, God's Reign calls us to simplicity and generosity. And instead of seeking instant gratification of every desire, God's Reign calls us to sacrifice – to disciplining our bodies and desires toward that which brings life to others and ourselves. This is why the writer says that God's Spirit is 'envious' of us, and why we need

humility in order to resist the 'devil' – the temptation to live self-centred lives. It is also why we need tears, because the only way to opt out of 'the world's' values, is to acknowledge their power over us and repent.

How are you tempted to befriend the self-centred values of human society? How can you humble yourself and submit to the values of God's Reign today?

### DO:

While repentance is certainly one powerful way to humble ourselves, another, equally important way, is to let go of our habits, assumptions, and certainties. When we refuse to examine our lives, we are unable to change. But, when we are humble enough to do the work of reflection and opening to change, then we are able, by the power of God's Spirit, to become more Christlike. Today, make time to examine yourself humbly and honestly.

### PRAY:

As I examine my heart, O God, reveal any place where I live by values that are not yours.

*Saturday 10 October 2020*

### READ:

Mark 2:18-22

### REFLECT:

There is no shortage of ways to pretend to follow Jesus while ignoring the tough call of the Gospel to a different kind of life. We can quote the Bible, attend church, and pray as much as we like, but if our lives do not conform with the mission of Jesus, none of it has any real value. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were good at doing things that looked spiritual but made no real difference to the world. Instead of helping the poor and marginalised, they imposed impossible requirements on them and excluded them from the worship life of Israel. Instead of working for justice, they used their position for their own comfort and safety and ignored the needs of those around them. And then they got upset when Jesus did not do the things they felt were required to be accepted by God.

But Jesus came to show a completely different way of living in which the

spirit, not the letter, of the law was important. Jesus did not encourage fasting for the sake of fasting or praying for the sake of praying. Jesus called his followers to the heart of these disciplines, which was to learn to love justice and mercy and to walk humbly with God. But, to receive this 'new wine' we have to change to become 'new wineskins'. We cannot live the Jesus way by thinking, feeling, acting and interacting the same old way. We have to learn new ways of being. If you don't want to change, you probably won't want to follow Jesus!

Where, in your life, are you trying to put new wine into old wineskins? How can you become a new wineskin today?

### DO:

The ability to follow the way of Jesus does not come naturally to us. We cannot transform ourselves into new wineskins. We need the power of God's Spirit. But, when we open to the Spirit, we do change, and our lives begin to reflect the new wine of Christ. Today, keep a prayer of invocation on your lips, and constantly invite the Spirit to fill and change you.

### PRAY:

Come, Holy Spirit, and transform me into a new wineskin which holds and pours out the new wine of Christ's love, grace and justice.

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