



03 July – 09 July 2022

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

All the readings in the Lectionary this week speak of God working in very natural and ordinary ways. In a world where reality television can lead us to believe that we don't matter unless we're celebrities, this message is healing and profound. Even in the Church, where God's work is often viewed solely through the lens of the "great", the "powerful", and the "significant", we can easily end up missing the everyday miracles and the routine acts of God. The problem with our obsession with the supernatural and the dramatic is that those of us who are just ordinary people, with very ordinary gifts, can begin to believe that we have nothing to offer the Reign of God. And then we may end up doing nothing as we wait for the prominent and charismatic leaders in our world to step in. Also, when our language is only about "changing the world" for Jesus, we too easily forget that the most important change we need to make is in ourselves.

Let us not underestimate the significance of choosing daily to be a little more like Jesus, and to be a little more committed to the values and purposes of God's Reign right where we are. In fact, the only thing that really changes the world is when millions of ordinary people make ordinary contributions to the common good. So, when we give generously and sacrificially to worthy causes, we make a difference. When we refuse to laugh at, or listen to, jokes that are racist, chauvinistic, or unkind, we make a difference. When we treat others with kindness, patience and understanding, even when they do things that hurt us, we make a difference.

This week we explore the power of small, ordinary things.

SUNDAY 03 JULY 2022

Read: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Reflect: The scene in today's reading is deceptively simple. In preparation for visiting a number of towns, Jesus sent his disciples on ahead of him. His instructions were, essentially, that they should expect, and depend on, the hospitality of the people to whom they were being sent. This was a very ordinary part of life in those times - it was expected that travellers would be offered hospitality, and to refuse to do so was considered very rude. As they moved from home to home, the disciples were told to stay with the first family in each town who welcomed them. They were not to move around the town if they found a better place to stay. And whatever they were given to eat, they were to accept. Essentially Jesus was telling his disciples to be good guests, because in this way their message would more easily be received. What an ordinary way to witness!

Of course, though, there was to be no coercion. If the people to whom they went rejected peace, refused to receive God's messengers, or even rejected them, they were to proclaim that God's Reign had visited them - ensuring that the people knew what they were missing - and then move on. Notice how excited the disciples were when they returned because demons had submitted to them. But, for Jesus, this was not the important thing. What was far more significant was that they had been welcomed into God's family - very naturally and easily.

How can you witness to the love and grace of Jesus in your own ordinary way today?

Do: The discipline of proclamation - of witnessing to God's message and mission - is not reserved for ministers or missionaries. Nor is it limited to bold words and dramatic acts. Rather, when ordinary followers of Jesus choose to live with kindness, compassion and hospitality, others notice and are drawn to Christ. Today, allow your ordinary routine to witness to Jesus.

Pray: May my ordinary life reflect your love and grace, Jesus.

MONDAY 04 JULY 2022

Read: 2 Kings 5:15-19

Reflect: If you read or heard the story of Naaman's healing in church yesterday, you will have noticed how radical his change was.

When he first came to Elisha for healing, he was offended that the prophet sent a servant out to speak to him, instead of greeting him in person. Then when he was told that he would need to wash in the Jordan River in order to be healed of his leprosy, he was angry, asking why the rivers in his home country were not good enough. Thankfully a brave servant gently challenged him to reconsider, and to do what the prophet asked, and the result was that Naaman's leprosy was healed - as was his arrogance. Now, in the passage we read today he returned to Elisha to say thank you, and to promise that he would not serve any other god than the Lord.

There was a lovely moment of grace here, though, as Naaman asked for forgiveness in advance for bowing to other gods. He knew he would have to help his king to worship - that to refuse to join his king would be both disloyal and dangerous - and so he sought reassurance from Elisha that God would understand. In response, Elisha simply said, "Go in peace." It was a lovely, ordinary moment of grace, understanding and support for this new believer.

How can you contribute to God's Reign by offering understanding and grace to someone in your life today?

Do: It is easy for us to impose our standards of belief, ethics, and faithfulness on others, and to be offended when they don't live up to them, but this only brings pain and drives people away from God. But, when we welcome and accept others in Jesus' name - leaving whatever changes are needed to God - we bring comfort and healing, and draw others closer to God. Today, try to be understanding and welcoming with everyone you meet.

Pray: Give me an understanding and welcoming heart, O God, to touch others with your love.

TUESDAY 05 JULY 2022

Read: Psalm 6

Reflect: One of the problems with a faith that is focussed on the supernatural is that we come to believe that any crisis, any suffering, or anything that does not go the way we believe it should, represents a failure of our faith. You don't have to go too far to find preachers who will tell you that, with enough faith, your life will be

filled with health, wealth, and happiness. But this is not the testimony of the Bible. Yes, Jesus promised life. Yes, in God's presence is fullness of joy. But, neither of these blessings precludes the reality of pain in our lives. One of the most natural facets of being human is our capacity to grieve. Every "hero" or "heroine" of the faith in the Scriptures went through times of failure, struggle and grief - including Jesus. That's what makes Psalms like today's reading so powerful and so comforting.

It seems that the writer had done something that he felt had brought God's discipline upon him. But, in spite of this, he trusted in God's care and compassion, asking God to save him not because he deserved it, but because of God's faithful love. Then, after crying out to God, he affirmed his faith in God's presence and God's answer. We can only get to a place of peace and trust like this when we are willing to travel through the grief. If we try to deny it, "naming and claiming" some supernatural intervention to deliver us, we only shut down our hearts and set ourselves up for greater grief and despair. Too many people have lost faith altogether because of this "overly spiritual" view of faith. A natural, but strong faith recognises that good and bad are part of life, and that God is with us through it all.

How can you recognise God's presence and activity in the natural routines of your life today - even if you're grieving?

Do: Somehow many believers have come to think that they must keep their grief out of worship. As we gather with others, we tend to hide anything that is broken or hurting in our lives, but we can find no healing when we do this. When we bring our grief into God's presence and cry out to God, though, we can journey through to a place of comfort and peace. Today, bring your own grief - or if you're in a good place, the grief of others - honestly before God.

Pray: Hear my cry, O God, for I trust in you in good times and bad.

WEDNESDAY 06 JULY 2022

Read: 2 Kings 6:1-7

Reflect: In a week where we're exploring the power of the ordinary, this reading may seem like a contradiction. Can anything be less natural than a heavy piece of metal floating on water? It's important

to remember that the writer - whose purpose was to explain why God's people had been conquered and exiled - was trying to remind his readers that God had never left them, and that there were prophets in Israel, but that the people refused to listen to them. In order to show that Elisha was a genuine prophet, the writer highlights the "supernatural" works of this man of God.

However, the scene in which this remarkable act happens is a very natural one. A group of friends are chopping down trees to build a new meeting place, and the axe head flies off one handle. The man is dismayed because the axe is borrowed. This is an incredibly natural and ordinary situation, similar to ones in which any of us could find ourselves. What stands out, though, is that the prophet - and by extension the prophet's God - is concerned for these small details of life. Elisha doesn't rebuke the man and tell him to worry about more important things. He comes over and helps the man address his concern, ensuring that both the borrower and the owner of the ax are cared for. It is usually in such ordinary situations that we encounter the extraordinary grace of God.

How can you be God's agent of extraordinary grace in the ordinary routines of your life?

Do: We may not receive such dramatic responses to our prayers, but this does not mean that our prayers are unimportant. On the contrary, prayer remains one of the most effective ways to experience and share God's extraordinary grace. Today try to offer short breath-prayers whenever you, or someone with you, needs a touch from God.

Pray: As I pray, O God, may your grace flood through me and through those around me.

THURSDAY 07 JULY 2022

Read: James 2:14-26

Reflect: There are two important principles that come out of today's reading. The first is that faith is not separate from how we live. In fact, in Biblical terms, faith is not about ideas at all. Rather, it is about how our lives are changed and shaped by our dependence on God's ways. There is an order to how things work, though. James

makes it clear that we do not act in order to earn God's grace. God's grace comes to us freely, and undeservedly. But, if grace has really taken hold of us, that must manifest in living according to the priorities and values of grace. Grace comes first. Works follow - but follow they must.

The second principle is that faith is not some mysterious, magical thing. Sometimes we make out that faith draws us away from the natural, ordinary routines of life and calls us to focus on "more important", "heavenly" things. But James also makes it clear that living in faith is as natural as giving food and clothing to the poor. It is when the normal, mundane, but serving and helpful, tasks of life are done with great love that God's Reign is shown. Prayer and worship are not an escape from life, but a classroom in which we learn to engage life more fully and practically in Jesus' name.

On Sunday we will explore what it means to measure our faith - and the measure, as we will see, is how practically and indiscriminately we love others. How can you put your faith into loving action today?

Do: It's never hard to find ways to serve others. When we release the need to be "great" or "spiritual" in our service of others, we will discover that there are numerous simple and practical ways to share God's love. Today, look around you, and when you see a need, try to meet it in a quiet, practical way.

Pray: Show me how to be a channel of your grace by serving others in practical ways, O God.

FRIDAY 08 JULY 2022

Read: Psalm 82

Reflect: To understand today's Psalm we need to understand something of the worldview of the time when it was written. Verse 1 speaks of "heaven's court". This refers to the ancient belief that God often held a heavenly council or court with other heavenly beings (or "gods") present. In these meetings, important cosmological decisions were made. In today's reading, God is standing in judgement on the heavenly beings, for they were supposed to be bringing justice on the earth, and they had failed. The poor and marginalised were suffering, and, for God, this was unacceptable, so

the heavenly beings were to be brought down like mortals. The view expressed here is that what happens in the human world is the consequence of what happens in the world of the gods. This may seem strange to us, except when we remember that there is a long tradition of viewing these "gods" as human rulers and leaders. When those who have received authority use it for their own ends, and not for the justice and wellbeing of others, they fail in their calling, and God stands in judgement on them. The measure by which God judges is love for "the least".

For those of us who are not "gods" in the sense of holding great political, economic, or social power, the same measure applies. In the final verse the Psalmist asks God to judge the earth - to measure us all against God's standard of justice and love. This means that we are all called to be part of God's justice-bringing work in the world. We do not need to have great influence, or massive resources, or important connections to make a difference in the world. We only need to love those around us as best we can, sharing the grace, compassion, generosity, and kindness of Jesus with everyone who crosses our path.

If God were to measure you against God's standard of love and justice, how do you think you would fare today?

Do: We all have those whom we struggle to love. Our judgement and suspicion of these people does not help to bring justice and healing into our world - it only makes things worse. This is why, if we are to become people of love and justice, we must take the time to acknowledge our lack of love, and offer it to God for healing and forgiveness. Today, whenever you find yourself choosing anything other than love, confess it to God.

Pray: When my love for those around me grows weak, O God, forgive me and strengthen me.

SATURDAY 09 JULY 2022

Read: John 3:16-21

Reflect: If we read this section of John's Gospel too quickly, we may miss the seeming contradiction between verse 17 and verse 18. In verse 17 Jesus proclaims that he did not come into the world to

judge the world, but to save it. But then in verse 18 he seems to be saying that it is only those who believe in him who are saved, and those who do not believe are judged. This is only a problem if we define salvation (being saved) as what happens after we die. But this is not what Jesus is talking about here - we know this because he goes on to speak about the way we live here and now.

God's light has come into the world - this is Jesus and the message of God's Reign he proclaimed. When we embrace God's Reign and seek to live it out in our lives, it is like God's light floods our lives, and we become those who bring grace and justice into the world. But, if we love darkness more than the light - in other words, if we choose our own little Empires more than God's Reign - we are already "judged" in the sense that we place ourselves beyond the reach of God's alternative way of being - the way of love and justice. The result of this choice is that we face the consequences of our actions, and end up living a life of conflict, pain, manipulation and fear - a dark life, indeed.

Believing in Jesus is not just about the ideas we hold in our heads about Jesus. It is about orienting our entire lives around the message and mission of Jesus. Unless our lives reflect the love and justice of God's Reign, we have not yet believed in Jesus at all. This is the measure of faith. How do you reflect the light of God's Reign in your life?

Do: Sometimes the best way we can share God's love and justice with others is simply to give them the gift of our presence. When we stand with those who are struggling, who are oppressed or marginalised, we reflect the light of God's justice. This is really just about offering our friendship and protection when others are rejected, mocked, discriminated against, or treated badly. Today, stand with the hurting in your world.

Pray: In your name, Jesus, I stand with those who are hurting and rejected.