



16 October – 22 October 2022

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Persistence, prayer and being open to the coming of God's presence into our lives to write God's law on our hearts - these are some of the thoughts that stand out in the various readings that are set for this Sunday. All of these ideas are related. When God comes into our lives, it is to save us, but a significant feature of God's salvation is that God changes us so that we stop doing to ourselves and others what brings us into bondage and brokenness. This is why we need God's law - God's way of living - written on our hearts. It is only when we naturally and automatically live the Jesus way that we are truly able to bring life, love and liberation into our corner of the world. And, of course, one of the primary "tools" we use to ask God to come to us is prayer. When we pray persistently, we constantly open ourselves to encounter with God, and the result is that we are changed - we slowly begin to align our values, our goals, our attitudes and our behaviours with those of God's Reign.

Ultimately prayer is not about the words we speak. It's about bringing our entire lives under the Reign of God – which is how we pray without ceasing. When we move away from seeing prayer as a way to manipulate things according to our desires and embrace it as a way to change ourselves according to God's desires, our prayers, and our lives, are filled with amazing power.

This week we explore what it means to be persistent in bringing our lives under God's Reign and turning our whole lives into a prayer.

SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER 2022

Read: Luke 18:1-8

Reflect: Although, it is common to view the judge in today's parable as representing God, it is usually unwise to make such direct allegorical interpretations of Jesus' parables. Jesus refers to the

judge as "unjust" (vs. 6), so it is unlikely that this is meant to represent God, unless we want to view God as unjust. However, there are two principles that Jesus does seek to communicate through this passage, and they come through in his final words. To begin with, he shows how persistence can get even an unjust judge to give justice to this widow, and then contrasts this with how God (who, he implies, is just) will certainly bring justice to God's people when they persistently cry out to God. These words were spoken as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die, which tells us that, even when all seems hopeless, we are not to lose heart and stop working and crying out for justice.

The second principle that Jesus is trying to communicate relates to faith. He asks whether, when he returns, he will find faith on earth. It is impossible to be persistent, and to constantly work for justice (both in our lives and in our world) if we lose faith. It is our conviction that God is just and desires justice, and our commitment to stay faithful to the cause until justice comes, that sustains us and ensures that we don't give up before we see the justice of God manifest among us. This is a basic principle of God's Reign – that we are to remain faithful in our commitment to bring love and justice into the world, in whatever small ways we can.

How can you recommit today to faithfully working for justice in your small corner of the world?

Do: When we remember that prayer is about changing us to conform with God's desires, we can't help but see how important it is to persist faithfully in prayer for justice. As we constantly pray for God's love and mercy to fill our world and lives, we are changed to be channels of that justice in our community. Today, make time to pray for specific justice issues in your world.

Pray: May your justice prevail in the world, O God, and in my life.

MONDAY 17 OCTOBER 2022

Read: 1 Samuel 25:2-22

Reflect: When King Saul grew angry with David and sought his death, David was forced to hide out in the wilderness with his soldiers and rely on their wits, and the generosity of the people, to

survive. The only thing they could give in return was to provide protection and ensure that nothing happened to make life more difficult for them. The wealthy man Nabal had benefitted from David's presence, and his flocks had been kept safe from harm by David's army. But when it came time for David to request supplies from Nabal - who could easily afford it - he refused and insulted David. This attitude of cruelty, arrogance and selfish hoarding is the opposite of what God expects from God's people. However, David's angry and violent response was not much better - he got his troops ready to attack Nabal and take what they needed by force.

Fortunately for Nabal, his wife, Abigail, was much wiser and humbler than he. She collected food to give to David and went out to meet him before he could attack her husband's household. In so doing, she protected her husband and ensured that when he died (which happened shortly afterward) she was spared the insecurity and shame of being an unmarried widow and was taken by David as his wife. Her wisdom, generosity and humility are a stark contrast to the actions of both men in this story, and it reveals how powerful simple Christ-like actions and attitudes can be in bringing peace and justice into the world.

How can you follow Abigail's example today?

Do: It is easy to take offense when others treat us differently from what we expect or think we deserve but doing so only escalates the breakdown of relationship and leads to aggression and hurt. The Christ-like attitude is to forgive - without requiring an apology - and to treat the other person as we would like to be treated. Today, try to put this humble, Christ-like, serving attitude into practice.

Pray: Teach me to treat all people with grace, humility, and Christ-like service, O God.

TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2022

Read: James 5:7-12

Reflect: Anyone who has followed Jesus for any length of time knows that God does not come to us in our way or at our bidding. While God is always coming to us, often God's presence is quiet and subtle and easily missed. And, when God comes to us, it's on

God's terms not ours. This is why it is so important for us to cultivate an attitude of patience and perseverance, as James makes clear in today's reading. The example of Job, and the reminder about the prophets, who endured patiently in times of suffering are a great comfort, because we see the impact that their lives had, and we also know how God worked in and through them. So, as we remember these examples of faith, we can draw strength from them as we continue to trust and hope in God's coming to us.

Notice how James teaches that we practice this patient perseverance through kindness and simplicity. When we are patient with each other, refusing to stand in judgement on each other, we are more easily able to experience God's presence through those around us. And when we keep our interactions simple and full of integrity - avoiding unnecessary oaths or exclamations - we remove anything that could obscure God's image in each other, or silence God's words in our conversation.

How can you practice kindness and simplicity in your interactions today?

Do: Words are important to God, which is why one of the names of Jesus is the Word of God. The way we use our words in our interactions can make the difference between experiencing God's presence or closing our hearts to the Spirit. Today, try to express kindness and simplicity by speaking simple words of benediction - good words - over everyone you meet.

Pray: As I use my words to bless others in your name, O God, so I encounter you through them.

WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2022

Read: Luke 22:39-46

Reflect: We all know the story of how the disciples failed to stay awake with Jesus before his arrest, and it is easy to judge them for their lack of compassion and commitment. But, if we're honest with ourselves we must admit that we, too, have sometimes failed to be as mindful and "awake" to God's presence and activity as we should. Today's reading says that the disciples were exhausted from grief and that this is why they fell asleep. In times of great struggle

and trauma, sleep can feel like an escape, a refuge that keeps us from having to deal with our fears and struggles. But Jesus calls the disciples to reject this kind of escapism and to pray instead. When we pray like this, we engage deliberately with our circumstances and feelings and invite God to meet us there. Then, as we experience God's presence, we are strengthened and comforted.

Notice how Jesus follows his own teaching here. Instead of trying to escape the coming suffering, Jesus spends time in prayer. His prayer is honest and raw, and he pours out his emotion and fear to God without shame or pretence. Jesus faced his trial head on in deep connection with his divine parent, and as he did, we are told that God sent an angelic messenger to strengthen him. If we want to persevere in faith during tough times, we will need to learn to follow Jesus' example of courageous, prayerful engagement with whatever situation we find ourselves in.

Where are you tempted to escape in your life? How can you face this challenge with courage and prayer today?

Do: The practice of confession is usually thought of in relation to sin, but it's really just about being honest with God. There is a sense in which Jesus was confessing his fear and longing for relief in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we give ourselves to this kind of honesty with God, we inevitably find new strength and courage for our struggles. Today, whenever you encounter news or situations that trouble you, confess your feelings honestly and ask God to strengthen you.

Pray: When I grow afraid, tired and tempted to escape, I confess it to you, O God, and you strengthen me.

THURSDAY 20 OCTOBER 2022

Read: Psalm 84:1-7

Reflect: When we speak about perseverance and patience, we automatically focus on what is difficult, painful or traumatic - there is usually no need for these qualities when things are going well! But it can sometimes feel like there is no joy in following Jesus when we focus on the call to sacrifice, simplicity and service, especially in times of persecution or struggle. That's why it is good to remember

what it really means to live with a sense of God's presence. We have already explored how it is God's presence that comforts and sustains us in our darkest times, but today's Psalm goes even further. God's presence is a place of joy, of transformation in which the "Valley of Weeping" becomes a "place of refreshing springs" (vs. 6). This is why the Psalmist boldly proclaims that those who seek their strength from God will continually grow stronger and will know what's it like to encounter God in meaningful ways.

Notice, though, how deep the longing is in the Psalmist's heart to enter God's courts. It's not that God is distant from us and that we need to go somewhere to find God. The longing does not come from God's inaccessibility. On the contrary, we always live in God's presence - God is everywhere! But, when we take this for granted, it is easy to forget how important this sense of God's presence can be for our souls. When we nurture an awareness of God, then everything becomes sacred, and even the smallest birds become a parable that can teach us and lead us closer to God.

How can you nurture a longing for God's presence in your heart today?

Do: When we regularly practice praise - acknowledging who God is - we automatically become more mindful of God's presence. Today, allow praise to keep you connected to a sense of God's Spirit around and within you. You may want to use the words of this Psalm to help you.

Pray: How I long to encounter you in every moment, O God.

FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2022

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

Reflect: It can be a little startling to notice how comfortable Paul is to point to his own life to teach and encourage others. This is not an act of pride from the apostle. Rather, it flows out of a deep humility in knowing that the transforming work of Christ has made him who he is. He knows how he has been changed, and he easily talks about the way God has used his life to demonstrate love, patience, faith and endurance. He also speaks freely - and with no bitterness - about the suffering and persecution he has experienced as he has

followed Jesus. Yet, through it all, you get the sense that Paul rejoices in all of it and has found every moment of pain to worth it for the glorious benefit of knowing Jesus and following his ways. This is also why Paul is so very bold to encourage the young Timothy to follow his example, even if it leads to persecution for him. Everyone who follows the way of Jesus will face persecution, he says, but he also implies that for followers of Jesus, the suffering is small in comparison with the joy.

The basic message that Paul seeks to convey here is that Timothy must remain faithful. It's a simple call - just to keep doing every day, what he has been taught since he was young. Notice how significant the Scriptures are for Paul in this work of faithfulness. There is nothing "magical" about the Bible, but it does give the wisdom we need to stay true to Jesus' message and mission.

How can you allow the Bible to teach you and sustain you today?

Do: It almost goes without saying that regular Scripture reading is an important and necessary part of nurturing our faith. If you haven't already, why not make a commitment today to reading large portions of Scripture as often as you can? You may even want to get a good reading plan to guide you through the Scriptures in a set period of time.

Pray: May your Scriptures teach me and sustain as I seek faithfully to follow you, Jesus.

SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER 2022

Read: Luke 1:46-55

Reflect: Christmas, when we usually read today's passage, is still a way off, but the message of Mary's song is not only for the Christmas season. What is interesting is that this response was not uttered immediately after the angel's declaration that she would give birth to God's Son. Rather it came when Elizabeth greeted her and acknowledged her pregnancy and its significance. It's as if it took someone other than Mary herself to recognise the truth of what was happening before she could fully accept it herself. But, when she did, her response was exuberant and profound.

Notice how Mary begins with her personal journey, celebrating what God has done for her, and openly acknowledging her lowly status. But then she moves beyond herself, proclaiming the significance of this event for the world. In the context of Luke's Gospel, this song establishes right from the beginning what the message and mission of Jesus was really all about - God's "upside-down" Reign of justice, peace and love. What makes this moment so special is that God's Reign is birthed through a lowly, humble young woman, who knows that she has done nothing to "earn" this privilege. We must never underestimate how powerful such humble openness can be in God's mission.

How can you nurture this humility in your heart today?

Do: One of the best ways to nurture humility in our hearts and lives is to resist developing any sense of entitlement. When we feel entitled to anything, it is easy to fall into thinking that God needs us and that we are somehow deserving of special treatment. But, if we commit to recognising and giving thanks for all that we have and are, we remind ourselves that we are recipients of grace who are not entitled to anything, but who enjoy God's blessing anyway. Today, allow thanksgiving to nurture humility in your soul.

Pray: I give thanks, O God, for all the grace and blessings I enjoy for which I am not worthy.