

## ***Sacredise Daily Worship***

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

05 - 11 February 2017

### **Thought for the Week:**

Immediately after the Beatitudes, Jesus was sure to clarify his relationship with the Law of Moses. He had not come to do away with the Law but to fulfil it, to help God's people to live the Law as it was originally intended - not as a set of legalistic rules to be ticked off a list, but as signs of a heart that was devoted to God and filled with love for other people. For Jesus it was all about the heart, because when the heart is right, this overflows into our whole lives. Neuroscientists and psychologists are now discovering how right Jesus was - our behaviour is determined far more by our heart, by what we love or desire, than by what we think. When Jesus taught about God's Reign, he started with calling us to love, and then explained what a love-filled life looks like by referring back to the law which, as he taught, can be summarised in the twin commandments to love God and love neighbour.

It is easy to make faith about what we think, determining whether we are "in" or "out" by certain ideas that we consider to be "essential" to faith. It is also easy to make faith about a list of rules that we either do or don't do, and to view those who fail to follow our rules as "out" while we, who obey the rules, are "in". These approaches were as common in Jesus' day as they are in ours, but he taught a different path in which we seek to have our hearts so captured by the dream of God's Reign that it becomes the motivation, the pattern, and the guide for all our thinking, doing, interacting, choosing and loving. And, when we are captivated by God's Reign, our lives reflect the character and purpose of Christ to those around us in ways that bring life and blessing to them.

This week we explore what it means to be captured by God's Reign so that we become salt and light in this world.

### **Sunday 05 February 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 5:13-20

**Reflection:** "Unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!" This final statement in today's reading may sound like the height of legalism, and it may seem out of place in the teaching of Jesus. But, when we connect it with what has come before it makes perfect sense, and offers us a liberating challenge. Jesus did not do away with the law, but sought to teach us how to live its proper intention as a guide for our hearts. The law was never meant to be a restrictive list of rules. Rather it was meant to free us from the brokenness of our hearts that causes conflict and pain, and it was meant to teach us how to love. The law was always supposed to be a matter of the heart, which overflows into action.

The metaphor of salt and light is a powerful one. Neither salt nor light are valuable because of what they are in themselves. Salt is valuable because it brings out the flavour in food, and light is valuable because it brings out the colour and beauty of the world. In these verses Jesus is calling us to be those whose hearts are so devoted to God and others that the world is a more flavourful and colourful place for everyone we encounter. And when we become people like this, the people whose lives we touch will inevitably praise the God who has formed us into such caring, creative people.

How can you live as salt and light today?

**Practice for Today:** When we try to be salt and light, we inevitably fail because we create a set of rules that we think are "salty" are "light" and we follow them legalistically. But, when we focus on learning to love, we automatically become salt and light to the world. One of the best ways to learn to love is to nurture a welcoming and open heart. Today allow the simple practice of greeting others to open your heart to them.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I learn to love as you love, Jesus, so I become salt and light to the world.

### **Monday 06 February 2017**

**Reading:** Psalm 119:105-112

**Reflection:** If there is ever a time when we are tempted to give up on faith, to neglect being lovers of God and of others, it's when

things go wrong in our lives. When we are involved in conflict with others, or when the support structures of our life fail us, that's when we often feel like we have an excuse to focus on ourselves and forget about serving God for a while. Yet, today's reading gives us a very different picture. Here the Psalmist cries out to God because of his suffering. He has "suffered much" and his "life hangs in the balance". "The wicked have set their traps" for him, yet, in spite of all this, the writer renews his commitment to God's commandments. No matter what he may be facing, he seeks to keep his heart open to God and to others, to live with integrity and faithfulness, and not to allow his struggles to rob him of his faith.

The first verse of today's section, which is very well known, explains why the Psalmist is so committed to faith. God's word is what gives him light and guidance. If he was to abandon God's ways, he would be lost, wandering in darkness without direction or support. But, with God's word to guide him, the writer knows that he can navigate whatever life throws at him, and that, as he lives in love for God and others, he will find strength and joy to carry him through. Our greatest sustenance does not come from withdrawal and self-protection. It comes from connecting more deeply with God and others. And God's word is just what we need to make these deep connections.

Today, allow God's word to strengthen and guide your life.

**Practice for Today:** If God's word is to be a light to us, we will need to be familiar with the whole of it, not just a few "proof texts" that we pull out in times of need. Not everything in the Bible is easy to read, or makes perfect sense to us, but it can all show us how to live, and how not live, and it can draw us into a deeper connection with God and others. Today and over the next few weeks, try to make time to read large sections of the Bible.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I allow your word to fill my heart, so you guide and strengthen me in love, O God.

**Tuesday 07 February 2017**

**Reading:** 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

**Reflection:** Leonard Cohen famously wrote: "There's a crack in

everything. That's how the light gets in". That's a similar sentiment to the one Paul must have had in mind when he was writing today's reading. We have the light of God's glory shining within us because of Jesus, but that light is held within the fragile clay jars of our lives. This means that God gives us the strength to avoid all forms of dishonesty and manipulation, while enduring whatever troubles, perplexity, knocks, suffering or persecution we may face. The reason we can face life with confidence and joy is not because of anything we have achieved, but because of God's power within us. The light of Christ which lives within us carries us through whatever darkness may come.

But, Paul goes even further than this. Even in the midst of all the struggles he describes, he affirms that he and the other apostles are servants of God's people for Jesus' sake, and that even though they face death, they continue to bring life to those around them. The amazing paradox of this way of living is that, even as the apostles face pain and suffering and death, they experience God's life in a richer and more vibrant way because they continue to share it with those around them. This is an important truth about the Christ-following life. When we share God's light and life, they grow and spread, even though darkness and death may seek to overwhelm us.

How can you share God's light with those around you today?

**Practice for Today:** When we face troubles it is easy for our prayers to become completely focussed on ourselves, and this is not necessarily wrong. But, if we really desire to know God's light, praying for others is usually far more helpful than praying for ourselves. Today, allow your prayers for those around you to open your heart and life to God's light.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I share your light and life, O God, so they grow in my own life.

**Wednesday 08 February 2017**

**Reading:** John 8:12-30

**Reflection:** Earlier in the week we read of Jesus calling his followers "the light of the world". Today, we read of Jesus applying

that same metaphor to himself, and in this he reveals how we can live as light and salt. When we follow Jesus, we do not walk in darkness, but we experience a light that leads to life. The religious leaders struggled with Jesus making this claim, but Jesus called on his Divine Parent as his witness. This is actually a less “spiritual” response than it may at first seem, and this is what confused the religious leaders. In their minds, for God to bear witness to Jesus would require some sort of Divine visitation or burning bush. But, for Jesus, God’s witness is based in relationship. If they had known God’s values and purposes, God’s character and mission, through a deep, heartfelt connection with God, nurtured through a devotional, humble reading of the Scriptures, they would have recognised Jesus as one who reflected God’s glory and God’s ways to the world. This relationship with God would have given them the discernment to know the light that was in Christ. But, they did not have this relationship with God, and so they also lacked discernment.

As if to drive the point home, Jesus went on to describe his relationship with God. He did it in an enigmatic way, speaking of being “from above” and of not belonging to this world. Then he spoke about his obedience to God in speaking only what he was instructed to say, and his confidence in how he was able to please God. It is clear that some of Jesus’ listeners were confused by his words, but the passage closes with the statement that many believed him. These were the ones who, through deep love for God, had the discernment to know the truth of Jesus’ claims. For them, the light of Christ shone in their hearts, and they found the light of life.

How can you open yourself more intentionally to Christ’s light of life today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the best ways to allow God’s light to shine on us is through the practice of praise. When we praise God, we are not just stroking God’s ego. We are acknowledging who God is, in order to get to know God better. Allow praise to open you to God’s light and life today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** I praise you, Jesus, for in you I find the light of life.

## Thursday 09 February 2017

**Reading:** Genesis 26:1-5

**Reflection:** God’s promise to Abraham, the great parent of God’s people, is repeated often in the Old Testament. In today’s reading it is repeated to Abraham’s son Isaac. Once again, God’s commitment to women and men is clear. Although Isaac was living in a land that was not (yet) his own, he had the reassurance that God’s presence would never leave him, but would be with him as much as it ever had been with his father.

But, there was a reason for God’s promise. It was not that God had chosen just one person, or one family, or even one people. God’s longing was for intimate relationship with all people, but to show us that we could be known and loved by God, God began with a few individuals. Right from the beginning, though, God continued to promise two things: that Abraham’s family would grow into a numerous nation, and that these people would be a light to the nations to bless all peoples and draw them to God. Unfortunately God’s people through the ages have been very keen to receive the promise of God’s presence and blessing, but have been less enthusiastic about sharing that blessing with others. Yet, if we are to follow Jesus and be God’s light to the world, we will need to develop the habit of sharing God’s presence, God’s blessing and God’s life with those around us.

How can you share God’s presence and life today?

**Practice for Today:** One of the simplest ways to be a light to others is to share whatever goodness we enjoy with them. Whether we have a little extra money or time or friendship or expertise or wisdom, when we share what we have with others we enrich both their lives and ours, and God’s light shines through us. Allow the practice of giving and sharing to fill your world with light today.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As I share the goodness I enjoy, O God, so I bring your light to others.

## Friday 10 February 2017

**Reading:** 1 John 2:7-17

**Reflection:** In this letter John includes all kinds of followers of Jesus

– young and old, new and mature. But, regardless of how long they have been disciples, the writer has the same challenge for these believers. They must choose what and how they will love. The world around us tends to reserve love for pleasure, power and possessions, and we know all too well the broken lives that follow in the wake of such “love”. But, for disciples of Jesus, the love we are called to is very different. We are called to love people just as Jesus did, and it is this love that shines within us like a light that dissipates whatever darkness we may encounter.

But, John is very practical and clear about what it means to live in the light of Christ. When we love our brothers and sisters we live in Christ’s light. But, when we refuse to love another person, we remain in darkness. It may be that the brothers and sisters John was referring to were other disciples of Jesus. But, we now know that we are all connected, and that every person is a brother or sister to every other one. So, it is not just Christians we are called to love, but everyone - and this is, of course, what Jesus taught, extending love even to enemies.

Who do you need to learn to love today?

**Practice for Today:** It is very easy to speak the words of love. But, love is not about what we say. Christ’s love means putting the needs of another person above our own. It is a practical, serving love. So, if we want to live in Christ’s light, we need to make serving others through acts of kindness a habit. Make today a day of kind service to those around you.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** As you have loved me, Jesus, so I seek to love others, not just in word, but in action.

### **Saturday 11 February 2017**

**Reading:** Matthew 15:1-9

**Reflection:** Last week we read Mark’s version of this story, but Matthew goes into far more detail. The religious leaders confronted Jesus about why his disciples did not wash their hands before eating. They were concerned for the observance of a rather unimportant ritual. In this account, Jesus turned the question back on his challengers by asking them why they ignored God’s

commandments. Then, Jesus gave a shocking example: they kept financial assistance from their parents by claiming their money belonged to God, and in so doing broke God’s instruction to honour parents. It was these spiritual games that caused Jesus to denounce the way the religious leaders honoured God in word, but kept their hearts far from God’s ways and God’s values.

It is easy to make our faith about saying the right things, or agreeing with certain doctrines and ideas. But, Jesus was far less concerned for this correctness. For Jesus faith was always about connectedness - connecting deeply with God and connecting deeply with one another. This is why he confronted the religious leaders on their determination to obey ritual over the call to compassion. The New Testament never speaks God’s light in terms of belief or purity. It always speaks of God’s light in terms of love and service. If we want to be the light of the world we need to be less concerned for issues of correctness and more focussed on connectedness.

How can you prioritise connectedness over correctness today?

**Practice for Today:** Few things connect us with others as easily as the act of blessing. Often when we gather for worship, we end with a word of blessing that sends us out to love and serve others. All we need to do is pass this blessing on in word and action. Today let your interactions with others be a blessing to them.

**Breath-Prayer for Today:** May all that I say and everything I do connect me with others in ways that bless them, O God.

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