

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
19 APRIL 2020 – EASTER 2

OPENING PRAYER

We have come, O God, to be clothed with power from on high. Meet us here with truth we can wear with confidence and with joy we can share with sincerity. Awaken us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to life in all its fullness here and now and grant us courage and strength and love as we praise you for all your goodness. Be with us as we lift up our hands, our hearts, and our voices, and prepare us for everlasting life with Christ Jesus - in whose name we worship. Amen.

SONG [Christ Is Risen \(In the Tomb So Cold\)](#) CCLI 52662

PSALM 16 – *A Song of Trust and Security in God*

- 1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
- 2 I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."
- 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.
- 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.
- 5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.
- 7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
- 8 I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
- 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.
- 10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.
- 11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

When every day seems the same,
with no one listening to our dreams,
our hopes, our fears and worries,
you pause, God our Baker,
turning your head
so you can read our lips.

When every road seems the same,
filled with despair's potholes,
littered with pain's detritus,
you come alongside us, God our Lover,
pointing out that side road
that will take us to Abba's Fine Eats.

When every step trips us up,
when every loss weighs us down,
when every grief breaks our heart,
you come, God our Keeper,
with your book of grace
filled with easy words
and lots of pictures
to teach us hope.

When everyone ignores us,
when everything disappoints us,
you walk with us, you talk with us,
you refuse to abandon us,
God in Community, Holy in One,
we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We cut you to the heart, Loving God, with the silly choices we make. We had hoped our lives would reflect your presence, but those around us can see how empty we are. We had hoped our words might bring healing, but they end up hurting those we love the most. We had hoped to find Jesus, but cannot see him in all those you send to us.

Oh, how foolish we are to think we can go on without your mercy, Lord God. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, you judge us impartially from the depths of your heart, so we may be born anew by your grace, to continue the journey into your future.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has commissioned us
to announce the forgiveness of sins.

You who have put your faith in Jesus the Messiah
will receive the outcome of your faith,
mercy for your sins and resurrection life in Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Be at peace.

Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [Jesus stand among us](#) CCLI 40155

A POEM FOR WORSHIP

Thomas, undone

*“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,
and put my finger in the mark of the nails
and my hand in his side,
I will not believe”
- John 20.25*

The unease you feel is not doubt.
It is hunger to go deeper.
You are not done yet.

Learn from Thomas,
who, when Jesus planned to go to Bethany
where they had tried to stone him,
said, “Let us go die with him.”

You want to see the scar of your betrayal
and how love bears it.

You want to touch the wounds
and enter the heart of The One
Who Suffers for the World
and lives.

Now, more than before,
you are ready to come and die with him,
let love undo you and begin again.

Don't belittle your restlessness.
Let it lead you.
Reach out.
Even now he is saying your name.

BIBLE READINGS

[Acts 2:14a, 22-32](#)

[1 Peter 1:3-9](#)

[John 20:19-31](#)

[YouTube](#)

SERMON [Cost benefit ratio of faith](#)

SONG [In Christ alone](#) CCLI 3350395

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Gracious Creator, you kept your promise to Adam and Eve alive throughout generations of faithful people. The Chosen People of Israel taught your love to their children and their children's children. According to your timing, your promise of salvation was brought to fulfilment through the birth, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Keep us vigilant in sharing this good news with each one we meet, not only through our words but through our actions. (Acts 2:14a, 22-32)

God our refuge and our strength, we live in times of trouble and pain. Around the world your people need your help to overcome bitterness and hatred, mistrust and prejudice. We pray for an end to violence in all homes, towns and nations. We trust you to bring resolution to conflict so that the world might know of your peace. (Psalm 16)

Blessed Lord God, You have provided us with innumerable riches, both here on earth and eternally with you. While we are here, make us aware of our bounty and generous in sharing it with all who are in need. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Healer of our every ill, you know what we need to be healthy and whole. When we doubt your power for our lives, show us your hands and wrap us in your embrace. We lift in prayer those who mourn... Transform them with the knowledge of your promise of resurrection. And for those who need your care for their physical, emotional or spiritual well-being.

Today, we pray especially for...

Give them new life in you. (John 20:19-31)

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Shout to the Lord](#) CCLI 1406918

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

As the father sent Christ Jesus,
so now you are sent.
Go then, with your hearts rejoicing,
as those who have touched the marks of truth.
Endure suffering,
forgive sins,
and love the Lord.

And may God's power be your protection;
May Christ Jesus reach out to you with words of peace;
And may the Holy Spirit fill you with indescribable and glorious joy. AMEN.

COST BENEFIT RATIO OF FAITH

Easter 2 Year A

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Ps. 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Jn. 20:19-31

19/04/2020

A minister was preaching one Sunday and during the course of his sermon asked the question of his congregation, “Who wants to go to heaven?” Everyone held up their hands except one young boy. “Son, don’t you want to go to heaven when you die?” “Yes sir, when I die, but I thought you was getting’ up a load to go now.”

That’s probably how most of us feel about the situation. Most Christians *do* figure that when we die we will go to heaven to be with the Lord, even if we are not ready to make the trip...later this afternoon, or even tomorrow.

At the beginning of the final seminar of the series, *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, which I presented during Lent in 2019, titled, *Intentional Faith Development*, three questions are asked: “Who believes they have been saved?” “Who believes they will be saved at the consummation of the age?” And, “Who believes they are being saved?” The answer to all three questions is, of course, “Yes.” If you believe in Jesus Christ, you have been saved, you are being saved and you will be saved at the end of the age—or when you die and go to heaven.

The first bit of that and the last bit of that is all fine. We have the assurance that through belief in God in Jesus Christ, we have been saved—we are on our way to the Promised Land. And we believe that at the final sorting at the end of the age, eternal life with God will be our reward.

It’s the bit in the middle that always seems to give us trouble. It’s the day-to-day going through life and dealing with all that life throws at us, that often makes it difficult to consistently live out our Christian lives. And sometimes we wonder at the cost.

One of the ways at looking at business productivity in this day and age and I guess, in other areas of life, is something called the, “cost benefit ratio.” This line of reasoning asked the questions: What does it cost? What benefits are realized if the price for the item or service is paid?

Wikipedia, the fount of all knowledge—both useful and otherwise—defines “cost benefit ratio” as, “an indicator, used in the formal discipline of cost-benefit analysis, that attempts to summarize the overall value for money of a project or proposal. A cost benefit ratio is the ratio of the benefits of a project or proposal, expressed in monetary terms, relative to its costs, also expressed in monetary terms.”

The general rule of thumb is that if the benefit is higher than the cost, the project is a good investment. Alternatively, one could suggest that if the cost is higher than the benefit, the project is *not* a good investment.

One of the values of using this approach to analyze projects or activities is that it removes passion or sentiment or emotion from the decision-making process and the choices that are made are judged on a much more rational basis—and we all like to be rational, don't we?

So, when it comes to weighing up the “being saved” aspect of Christian life, would it be a useful exercise to consider the cost benefit ratio? Can we use this kind of thinking in a church environment, or even for our own personal religious commitment? It happens everywhere in our society and it would seem that in many areas of the church, this is also the kind of thinking that goes on. Churches whose congregations have shrunk to the point of not being able to cover costs are often closed. Mission projects are shelved when churches are unable to fund them sufficiently.

Now, in many cases, this might seem to be a perfectly acceptable way to go. Certainly, if you want to make a go of any kind of business venture, the income generated by the business has to be greater than the costs—otherwise you will end up going bankrupt. And even in some aspects of the church, this way of thinking might be worth considering—depending on the issues at stake.

What about our religious commitment, then? Does this principal of cost benefit analysis apply to our Christian faith? In other words, what is the “cost benefit ratio” to us, for being a Christian? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

Well, lets have a look. The benefits are easy to list: intimacy with God, support of other Christians, purpose in life, eternal life after death insurance. But what about the costs?

What are some of the costs to being a Christian? The misunderstanding (or even loss) of family and friends, oppression by those in authority, increasing opposition by society and culture, being able to maintain hope amidst the grind of daily living. There is even outright physical, mental and spiritual suffering and persecution, depending on where you live.

You could probably list a whole lot more benefits and costs, but these probably sum up some of the main points of our reasoning. The benefits, I'm sure you will agree, are great but the cost can sometimes be very high. Just recently in the news there was a report that two Christians in Pakistan have been sentenced to death for sending a couple of, in the opinion of the court, blasphemous text messages insulting Mohamed. And even in Australia and the western world there is increasing opposition from, what I would regard as, militant atheists.

At the time that Peter wrote this letter that we are looking at this morning, the church in Asia Minor was having a really tough time. Persecution at the hand of the emperor Nero, was not only increasing, it was inevitable and expected.

In this letter, Peter, while not specifically using the cost benefit ratio of making decisions, *did* point out the benefits of faith while acknowledging the cost this congregation was facing. At no point was he trying to diminish the pain and suffering they were going through because of their faith. While he recognized that the costs for them were high, the benefits for them were a living hope that sprang from the resurrection of Christ and salvation—a hope that would be fully realized at the end of time. Peter tells them that God gave these benefits to them through their rebirth, which is a reference to their baptism.

The costs were exceedingly great to his readers. Early Christians were ostracized by family and friends, misunderstood in general society, and even persecuted for refusing to burn incense at an altar with the bust of the emperor on it. Persecution in the church at this time was intense. The decision to become and remain a Christian was never taken lightly—just as it is still not taken lightly in many parts of the world today.

Peter, however, does deviate from “cost benefit” reasoning in one significant way. He turned the cost into a benefit. The loneliness, the risk to your physical well-being and place in society were actually ways to strengthen your faith—like gold being refined in a fire. And so he argued for perseverance. Like gold that was melted in the furnace to be

shaped for jewelry, their faith was to be tested in the “furnace” of life so it would be worthy for worship in the Kingdom. In other words, what the Christian suffered in this life would prepare him or her for life in the next.

Australians and others of like mind, don't usually like this line of reasoning. We admire sacrifice, as long as it is someone else's sacrifice. We want gratification now! But, even we—in relatively safe Australia—need to take these words from 1 Peter to heart. Life is not always comfortable. In fact, it can be challenging, even oppressive. But, the measure of a life well spent is not the line: “The one with the most toys at the end wins.” The measure of your life is really the strength of character derived from the journey. The core of this strength is your faith. Do we still reach out to God and others, even when the cost is high? The kind of faith that can answer “yes” despite the hardships in life is the kind of faith worthy for the Kingdom. The benefit of the Christian life is a faith tested in fire that still looks forward to the glory of heaven.

Yes, we are constantly being saved as we seek to live lives worthy of the gospel. It's easy sometimes to become overwhelmed and threatened by circumstances. Our only hope lies in looking beyond the challenges—beyond the circumstances—to our future hope in Jesus Christ. And while it may be painful at times, as it certainly was for the congregation to whom Peter was writing, our comfort is in being reassured that ultimately we will not be abandoned—that God is there with us.

In times of adversity—and let's face it, this is a time of adversity, especially with the coronavirus spreading around the world—the refrain, “Blessed be God!” is a defiant assertion of hope and love. Often it's blurred by our not having answers and comes from a deep sense of alienation, perhaps even some form of exile. Love is our only hope, Christ's death and resurrection, is the way we make sense of it. When the mists clear, we will also see the world around us in a different way. Out of the emptiness of adversity sometimes all we can do is cry for hope: Blessed be God!

To him be all glory, honour and praise. Amen.