

Easter Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” As we celebrate the Season of Easter, may these readings draw us closer to the Reason for our being, Jesus the Christ. Though we worship “apart,” may we journey “together” into the new life that Christ our King has won for us. Let the Spirit of the Risen One lead you into God’s own heart, that we may live out Easter’s victory now and always.

Fourth Week of Easter

Monday, May 4

Read: Psalm 100

Reflection:

Is it possible to make a “joyful noise” during this season? Who’s going to hear it, anyway? Notice that the psalmist directs praise *to* God – *not* to our neighbors. Our praise is *for* God; our *love* is for our neighbors. In this time of continuing physical distance, our call to praise has not lessened – rather, the impulse for gratitude should *increase*!

Our thanksgiving does not have to flow from our circumstances, especially when it’s centered on our identity as God’s people, “the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3). We give thanks to God because this virus does not separate us from God’s love. We give thanks because God’s promises over us cannot be defeated by disease and disaster.

When the Bible calls for us to “know” something, that’s more than just a factual knowledge – it is an *intimate, embodied knowledge* that affects the way we live. When the Church gives thanks in the midst of difficult times, we’re proclaiming God’s reality over the world’s: “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (v. 5).

Prayer: *My voice may be weak from lack of use, and my arms unpracticed from raising them in worship, but help me to live gratefully for Your love and faithfulness today and forever. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 5

Read: Ezekiel 34:23-31

Reflection:

We’re not always comfortable having someone “over” us. As Americans, there’s a strong independent streak that’s implicit in our social and cultural DNA. However, what this prophet

speaks of is the leadership of God's Anointed – the Messiah, a true *shepherd king*. This is not tyranny; this is the hope of Christ who *gives us his life*, leading us into God's Kingdom through his own self-giving love.

The promise of Ezekiel that takes on flesh in Jesus is the transformational relationship we are invited into – where God's future steadily breaks into our present. Peace, flourishing, and living hope – these are the gifts of God that our Good Shepherd leads us into. It's not always apparent, because the Kingdom has not fully come, and so we live with the tension of God's final promises, and those promises becoming reality through Christ.

Yet as the “sheep” we're depicted as, we have to follow God in Christ *into* that future, even as God's Spirit makes it more and more a part of our life now. It's difficult to give up our own plans and visions for our life, but that kind of “giving up” is how we more fully enter the pasture of God's Kingdom.

Prayer: *Faithful Shepherd, lead me by Your grace into the peace of Your Kingdom; and when I stray to my own paths, help me to hear Your voice of love calling me back. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 6

Read: Matthew 20:20-28

Reflection:

As our world becomes more accessible through our screens, it's easy to compare and contrast each other and how we are coping with COVID-19. I, for one, look for those persons and groups who seem to be *thriving*. The creative posts, the thoughtful articles, the innovative outreach ideas – I see what other people are doing and, like the disciples, start to *grumble*.

This small episode should carry a mighty weight, not only for the Church as a whole, but for every disciple. “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (v. 26). Seems like Jesus wanted to give people a new way to measure themselves. It's not about your output during this season – it's not all the items you can check off on your to-do list. Rather, the “great” thing is the simple thing: *Show love*.

Practicing social distance, doing our part to “flatten the curve” and prevent unnecessary exposure – that's service right now. That's love for our neighbors. That's the “greatness” of God's Kingdom – not sitting at the right or left hand of God, but offering yourself up for those around you. Instead of concerning yourself with how your profile looks to the outside world, just be comfortable in your status as a child of God and focus on the simple things.

Prayer: *Make me a servant, LORD, because the only “king” in my life, should be You. Amen.*

Thursday, May 7

Read: Genesis 12:1-3

Reflection:

If God were to call us to “go” today, I’m sure we’d be more than happy to oblige, especially in this season! Our current circumstances aside, God’s call *remains* for people of faith, though it may not be a journey of “physical” proportions.

None of us have ever faced anything like this pandemic before, but God is faithfully leading us to be agents of blessing to all the world, regardless. It may require us to leave behind former ways of discipleship – it might mean participating in worship in ways as yet untried. Yet that does not mean God won’t be true to God’s promises to bless us and use us to bless others.

Although there’s no space on the “page” between God’s call and Abram’s response, that doesn’t mean that Abram didn’t hesitate. It doesn’t mean that Abram didn’t think things through or have doubts or even struggled to move his feet. The “good news” is that God seems to wait. God may wait, but what about others who are just itching for blessing?

Prayer: *Patient God, there’s so much “unknowing” right now. Help me to see Your promises, and follow them in service to Your world. Amen.*

Friday, May 8

Read: Exodus 3:1-12

Reflection:

Have you ever noticed that Moses had to “turn aside” to really *see* the burning bush? It wasn’t directly in his path – it was off to the side, partially out of sight and mind. Sometimes, God’s revelations may be like that – not always right in front of us, but “hidden” around the corner, off the beaten-path. And it seems God leaves us the initiative to venture out in “holy curiosity.”

I think the real surprise for Moses is *not* that this bush “burns” but is not consumed, but that the God of his ancestors *cares*. This deity of perhaps unknown character to Moses, at the time, shows up in the midst of his life to proclaim: “I have observed the misery of my people...I have heard their cry...I know their sufferings, and I have come to deliver them” (v. 7-8).

In such a season as this, maybe we need to look for more of those “holy surprises” that God *sees*, *hears*, and *acts*. God *knows* our struggles and plans to do something about them. Perhaps those signs aren’t always in front of us, but if we allow ourselves a little curiosity, maybe we’ll discover just how much God wants to save us.

Prayer: *God of our mothers and fathers, the One who holds us fast through all generations – keep surprising me and reminding me that You do hear and see and act in my life. Amen.*

Saturday, May 9

There are no texts for today. Instead, practice a true “Sabbath” and rest in the knowledge that You are loved by the God of the universe. Be true to that, and cease striving for anything else.

Prayer: *Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, for You are good, and Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

Sunday, May 10 – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m. – “Fifth Sunday of Easter”

Consider the guided meditation and join Pastor Jeffrey for a virtual Sunday worship:
<https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-111315> *Or, use this for your own at-home worship.*

Call to Worship

Leader: God of hope, Your gift of new life enables us for service, no matter the season. Your Presence can sustain us, even when trial threatens to overwhelm.

All: Help us love Your Way and desire Your promises, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 1:1-9

Consider Pastor Jeffrey’s sermon, or use the following questions for your own study:

- What signs do you see of “new life” through relationship with Christ?
- Do you think Resurrection hope has power and meaning now or is it only important at life’s end?
- How can discipleship “grow” during difficulty?

Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Risen One, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you now and forever. Amen.