

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.

Fifth Week of Easter

Monday, May 11

Read: Psalm 102:1-17

Reflection:

What I appreciate most about the psalms is their honesty – sometimes to the point of our own discomfort when reading them. The psalmist here is honest about their *frailty* – their situation is so dire they feel themselves wasting away. That kind of honest reflection is humbling – we don’t often feel comfortable being that vulnerable, that “weak” in the context of a society that prides itself on strength and independence.

Yet the lesson I’m taking from this prayer is the complete offering of “self” to God. The psalmist cries out to the LORD because they trust that God “will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer” (v. 17). Do we have such confidence in God’s love for us that we can be that brutally honest? Do we have faith in the compassion of our worshiping community that we can turn to our neighbors with our own dire straits?

When we’re closing in on the second month of this closure, perhaps it’s worth opening up to the Almighty with our “true” selves. Maybe we need not fear trying to be strong, when God is more than willing to embrace our wounded hearts and weary spirits.

Prayer: *My days may pass away like smoke, but You are forever, O God, and Your love is strong enough to carry me through. In Your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 12

Read: Proverbs 3:5-12

Reflection:

When I was a teenager, my mother gave me a bookmark with verse 6 from this text inscribed upon it: “In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” I thought that such wisdom meant I needed to “clear” things with God first before pursuing them, especially if I wanted to succeed in them.

This process, while well-meaning, quickly shifted into making God into the scapegoat for my own poor decisions – if God had given me the “pass” to do something, wasn’t God at fault if it went awry? You don’t have to learn Hebrew to read these verses in light of their larger context: this wisdom for faithful living is not about permissibility but *relationship*.

“Knowledge” in Scripture is rarely about facts or figures, but a kind of relational knowing – that by “knowing” God, you would know the kind of paths that would lead to faithful discipleship. Instead of trying to roll some “God-dice” and figure out the right moves, perhaps what’s more fulfilling is seeking to be drawn deeper into God’s life and Kingdom, rather than trying to sustain some pristine moral high-ground of your own.

Prayer: *May Your paths be the ones I would walk, in humility, patience and grace – and when course corrections come, help me to receive them with joy and not disdain. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 13

Read: John 8:31-38

Reflection:

Jesus often saw what others could not – the “chains” of sin holding us down, especially those who assumed they had “special standing” with God. It’s easy to assume as “church-going people” that “sin” is a problem “other people” have to deal with. From the Bible’s perspective, sin is a human problem, no matter what, no matter who – it’s individual *and* communal.

We need not envision a list of rules we break, but rather, through our actions (and inactions) how we fail to love God and our neighbors. And those failures enslave us, whether we realize it or not. We become slaves to our selfishness, pride, anger, jealousy, gossip, prejudice – again, this is not a list of vices for lists’ sake, but to think critically about all those minor and major ways we do not love God’s Image in ourselves and those around us.

But the Good News is that Jesus *sets us free*. And not just “free” – but “free *indeed*.” That means that we can trust Jesus really has the power to break us from those “chains” – that whatever guilt or shame the world throws our way for our mistakes, Jesus can remove them fully. Those failings don’t hold power over us – the love of God exhibited in Christ does. What we do with that freedom – that’s the true test of discipleship.

Prayer: *Liberating God, thank You for releasing me from bondage. Help me to honor that freedom by living Your Kingdom more fully each and every day. Amen.*

Thursday, May 14

Read: Psalm 66:8-20

Reflection:

There's always the risk of a theological mire when we speak of God "leading" us *into* testing. Though we may have a healthy view of God's power over all things, it can become a slippery slope when we begin debating on whether or not God has placed this hardship before us. If we consider carefully not only this text, but the variety of voices in Scripture, we may appreciate their nuance of God's presence *in the midst* of testing.

When we do face hardship, we have the opportunity for growth – no one comes out of a difficult experience *unchanged*. Perhaps the more impactful sentiment would be to share in this psalm's celebration of God's ability to use those experiences to shape us for good. Not only can God overcome difficulty with redemption, but that redemption looks like "a spacious place" (v. 12).

When we experience God's victory over our pain, what else can we do but "tell what he has done for me" (v. 16)? Our worship and discipleship are always responding to God's triumph in us.

Prayer: *O LORD, how marvelous it is that You hear my cries of distress, and never fail to be present in times of trouble! With that love in view, I sing to You each and every day. Amen.*

Friday, May 15

Read: Acts 27:1-12

Reflection:

I used to skip over pieces of the Bible like this, finding very little interest in these narratives that seemed void of the miraculous or the overtly-religious. Yet the early Christian community saw value in these texts that they felt led to include them in their sacred library – they named such mundane travel itinerary as "scripture."

What bits and piece of our lives do we think has little "religious" or "spiritual" value because it lacks the "luster" of miracle and adventure? Just because our lives don't appear on the Hollywood screen doesn't mean that God doesn't use them as blueprints for discipleship. Just as following along the travel log of the Apostle Paul sketches the map for the spread of the Good News in the ancient world, so might listening to the winds of the Spirit blow in our daily ventures uncover God's Kingdom *in* our midst.

The great "scandal" of the Gospel is that it takes the "ordinary" of human life and points it toward the extraordinary love of God Almighty.

Prayer: *Whether I'm driving along Niles Ave or I-94, or if I'm walking down main street St. Joseph or Bridgman, use my story, O God, to proclaim Your glory. Amen.*

Saturday, May 16

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 17 – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m. – “Sixth Sunday of Easter”

Consider the guided meditation and join Pastor Jeffrey for a virtual Sunday worship: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-997406> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Great and loving God, we praise You for the peace in Jesus the world cannot give; Your abiding Presence in the Spirit promised. Calm our troubled hearts, and dispel every fear.

All: Keep us steadfast in Your love and faithful to Your Word, that we may always be Your dwelling place. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 66; 1 Peter 2:1-10

Whether you join for virtual worship or study on your own, consider these questions:

- What would it look like for God to “build up” your life as a “house” for worship – what kinds of things are needed for such spiritual renovation?
- Do you think being “chosen” by God means missional responsibility or special privileges?
- Do you feel there really is a change in identity – from “not a people” to “God’s people” in the Christian life?

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.