

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.

Seventh Week of Easter

Monday, May 25

Read: Leviticus 9

Reflection:

Animal sacrifice was a violent act for a violent world – but some 2,000 years later, our world really hasn’t become any *less* violent. World wars, prison camps, terrorist acts, genocide – so many horrific things that the people of the Bible would’ve been as shocked as much as animal sacrifice now shocks us. But even then, such acts of ceremony were also signs pointing to something “more” – a hidden world behind the Law and the religious rites.

The Kingdom of God was symbolized by the offering of life – that in shedding the blood of bulls and goats, the people of God were to offer *their* lives to God’s glory, as God had rescued them from bondage. Human life is *sacred* – God’s commands to the people always centered on preserving and stewarding that life. Memorial Day reminds us of this in a very somber way: the lives lost to those in armed service to protect human life should serve as a symbol that protecting others is *costly*.

We may not all be called to wear a uniform, but we can honor those who have by “raising our hands in blessing” (v. 22) and preserving life. Instead of working so hard to preserve our own, perhaps our energy is better spent in the Way of God’s Kingdom and lifting up others.

Prayer: *The life You have given is a gift – help us to honor those who have offered up that gift for others, and for us to do the same in our own ways of discipleship. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 26

Read: Numbers 16:41-50 (consider whole chapter for context)

Reflection:

Whether or not you read this text as historical narrative or teaching fable (or both), there's a beautiful reminder that God provides the means to "stand in the gap." The judgment on rebellion was not pronounced without redemption – though our actions rightfully have consequences, there's always a "wideness" to God's mercy.

Please don't read this as a parallel to our current pandemic – COVID-19 is *not* a divine plague. Yet perhaps we can draw lines to wanting to take matters into our *own* hands – maybe we can relate to the feeling of wanting power and control over our fates because no one else but *us* deserves to be in the driver's seat. This season has humbled me in such a way where such delusions about power and control have diminished.

Reading this text anew helps me see a God willing to stand between "life and death" for us – even in the ways I rebel against God's Kingdom, God's promises to be with me overcome. Israel survived the revolt of Korah, and countless other failings – still God remained *with* them. The same can be said for the Church. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: *I want to be in the driver's seat, God; but how often do I end up careening off the road? Keep me in Your Way, and strengthen me by Your commitment to grace. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 27

Read: 1 Kings 8:54-61

Reflection:

Solomon's prayer after completing the Temple (1 Kings 8:22-53) is beautiful, but it's these words of blessing that hold our interest today. What words of blessing are we offering to one another in this season? Notice how Solomon's blessing stems *from* God *to* the people where it circulates before *returning* to God?

That's the route a blessing should take – God's gifts flow to creation, where they percolate and simmer, growing and changing like a storm front, showering moisture on weary souls to bring life, and then, when their work is accomplished, returning to the Maker of such gifts in *praise*. Sometimes, there's obstacles in that path – sometimes, we get so used to "receiving" gifts that we fail to return them – in kindness, generosity, and forgiveness.

Perhaps this is what Solomon meant by "devoting yourself completely to the LORD" (v. 61) – making sure that the blessings of God do not return to God "empty-handed." Especially in a season like this, maybe it's part of our discipleship to keep the path of blessing going smoothly.

Prayer: *Praise God from whom all blessings flow – may we join in that continuous flow from heaven to earth and back again. Amen.*

Thursday, May 28

Read: Psalm 33:12-22

Reflection:

As much as it might seem like it, this psalm is *not* describing the “Divine Watchmaker” – the god who just creates and then steps away to watch life play out dispassionately. This text affirms the God of Israel – the God who creates and *remains present* to that creation, passionately working towards redemption.

The eye God directs to the world is like one who watches their family at play – that kind of sight is one of immense love and consideration. This is good news for those who think that their life is “hidden” to the great and powerful Creator – who believe as if God watches but does nothing. God’s eye is on the world “to deliver” (v. 19).

In this season where so much is “visible” through our screens yet we might feel “hidden” away in our homes – remember that God *is* watching, and God is also *working*.

Prayer: *Let Your steadfast love be upon us, O LORD, even as we hope in You. Amen.*

Friday, May 29

Read: Romans 8:1-17

Reflection:

There’s a false dichotomy between “spirit” and “flesh” often perceived when reading texts like this *without* proper understanding of context. When *we* read “flesh” – we think “physical” / “material.” When we read “spirit” we think of the *non*-physical. However, the biblical writers never separated “spiritual” from “physical” – it was all about *motivation* and *output*.

To live in the “spirit” was to be motivated by the Spirit of God, and thus, through right relationship (discipleship) produce the kind of “Kingdom life” God calls us to. This did *not* mean that one no longer cared about the material world or sought to distance themselves from a physical existence. Instead, the idea was to no longer allow the “flesh” (sinful inclinations towards “self” over others) to continue producing fruits *unworthy* of God’s Kingdom (lying, cheating, murder, etc.)

Through Christ, we have a whole new way of embracing God’s good creation – which *includes* the physical realm. This is the “life” the Spirit leads us toward. An important reminder when our sense of physicality may feel uncertain, and our being feels compromised.

Prayer: *Spirit, keep me living God’s Kingdom – even in physical distance. Body and soul. Amen.*

Saturday, May 30

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 31 – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m. – “Pentecost Sunday”

Consider the guided meditation and join Pastor Jeffrey for a virtual Sunday worship: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-505877> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Spirit of the Living God, You make us the body of Christ – Your power unites us across language and culture, birth and blood. Your breath brings new life in us and in our world.

All: God of power, may the boldness of Your Spirit transform us, may the gentleness of Your Spirit lead us, and may the gifts of Your Spirit be our goal and strength. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 104:24-34; Acts 2:1-21

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

- How does the Holy Spirit cross “boundary lines?”
- What about the Spirit connecting people has ramifications for our discipleship?
- What does it say about God that God’s power is made known in the creation of community – that God’s Spirit “unites?”

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.