

Pentecost Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” As we celebrate the Season of Pentecost, may these readings draw us closer to the Spirit of the Living God, who dwells with us always. Though we worship “apart,” may we journey “together” into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us. Now is the season for the Church to come “alive” with the Spirit’s power at home and in our daily lives.

Third Week of Pentecost

Monday, June 15

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Reflection:

What does it take for us to “reach out?” At what point do we realize we cannot do this ministry work alone? For the Apostle Paul, there was no solely individual endeavor – it was always intertwined with the whole community. Paul kept in touch with the people he visited and had helped established gatherings of believers – in some ways, Paul saw these communities as his own “children.” He prayerfully sought their welfare throughout his journeys.

As limitations and restrictions lessen, and in-person gatherings begin to take place – there will remain the element of disconnect. Even with lowering restrictions, the risk of the virus is still present, particularly for direct physical contact and poorly-ventilated indoor spaces. How do we use both caution and the prayerful intent of Paul to keep connected and offer care? This season has done a lot of damage – physically, economically, emotionally, spiritually – how do we help build one another up, strengthening the ties that bind us?

Trial is part of the journey of discipleship, because the Way of Jesus seeks to continually give up self *for* others. That kind of costly self-offering is difficult, but it’s “what we are destined for” (v. 3). Don’t let fear or doubt keep at bay the power of community.

Prayer: Like Paul sending Timothy, God, You send Your Spirit to make certain no one is shaken. Remind us that, through Your love eternal, we belong to a community that can never be broken. Amen.

Tuesday, June 16

Read: Genesis 25:7-11

Reflection:

There are likely many moments like this we miss in Scripture, because of how “ordinary” they appear. “Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age” (v. 8) – that’s the kind of simplistic ending many of us may hope for in our own lives, and so it’s easy just to “skip ahead.” Yet to do so misses the true beauty of this narrative. At the end of his life, Abraham’s sons – Ishmael and Isaac, come together to bury their father.

If you know the larger story, then you know these two brothers had very difficult relationships – Ishmael, the child of Abraham’s slave girl; Isaac, the child of promise, and yet, brought forth as a potential sacrifice. We are not told of their relationships with Abraham – but we can imagine that after the events of their upbringing, Abraham was not the “father of the year.” Nonetheless, Ishmael and Isaac stand side by side to grant him the dignity of burial.

There are other ways to read this little footnote, but what I hear is that God’s last word is always reconciliation. Between families, nations, neighbors, sinners – God’s love offers peace, even in the face of final breath. No matter how broken a narrative may seem, God alone holds the bigger story in God’s own heart.

Prayer: Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers – there’s a long line of family reunions that may be telling more than just happy endings: Your love unites us. Amen.

Wednesday, June 17

Read: Luke 6:12-19

Reflection:

When I read the names of the apostles, I think about how everyone has a name, even if the rest of the world doesn’t know them. Names give us a social location – they function as windows into our identity. Even if people change their names, they still go by *something*, in order to be known. When the Bible “names” someone, it’s a way of establishing links in the story – of connecting the dots and highlighting that this person’s story is *also* part of God’s grand narrative.

There are also many people in the Bible who aren’t named – but that does not mean they are not part of God’s story. Jesus had many disciples, and though they are not “named” – they are no less “apostles.” Apostle means “sent one” – the twelve chosen by Jesus are like the first sets of dominos, that from their movement the others in the line will fall.

Our names may not be written in the newspaper or listed in the church bulletin, but God knows who we are. God knows *whose* we are – and if we follow Jesus, then we *are* “sent ones” every much as those first twelve. It’s through our lives that other names and faces will be shown their place in God’s story. *No one* gets left out of God’s list.

Prayer: You know our names, O God; help us love one another by sharing the Name of Christ. Amen.

Thursday, June 18

Read: Psalm 69:7-10, 16-18

Reflection:

The Gospel writers liked to use Scripture to express their understanding of who Jesus is and what he did. One such example was when Jesus overthrew the tables of the moneychangers in the temple, they referenced these words. Taken as a whole, this is a psalm of lament – a prayerful cry to God for deliverance against persecution as one dedicated wholly to God.

Jesus lived a life wholly dedicated to God, and that kind of singular devotion scared people. It frightened religious authorities because the Kingdom Jesus embodied cared little for their secular and sacred distinctions; it made civic authorities nervous because Jesus embraced pauper and prince alike. The disciples were captivated by Jesus' love and its manifestation in prophetic action – when they reread the Scriptures, they saw these words take on new life.

The prayers of God's people do not have a life expectancy – they are timeless, but we must do the work of utilizing them in a manner that bridges the contexts faithfully. We can cry out to God for deliverance, but perhaps, in the way of Christ, we can also embody these words through prophetic action. We can care for the most vulnerable and dismantle those forms of religious hypocrisy that demean the glory of God.

Prayer: *LORD, draw near to us, and in return, help us draw near to You, and through You, our neighbor. Amen.*

Friday, June 19

Read: Acts 5:17-26

Reflection:

This text reveals what costly discipleship is all about. The apostles faced willingly the threat of imprisonment for proclamation of the Gospel. Our own context is free from that threat due to our constitutional rights. However, if we take the way of Jesus seriously, our discipleship may bring us into the discomfort of public scrutiny and perhaps, the threat of violence.

We live in a time of great upheaval – not only due to the pandemic, but to the greater divides of politics and racial injustice. The Gospel may bring us into conflict with those forces, and though our religion is protected, the way we practice may not be free from harsh response. Following Jesus may mean standing with those who suffer from broken systems and oppressive powers – it may look like putting our lives at risk to show Gospel love to our neighbors.

God calls: “Go...tell the people the whole message about this life” (v. 20). We must *answer*.

Prayer: *Grace is free, but our response is costly. Be with us, O LORD. Amen.*

Saturday, June 20

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, June 21 – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Consider the guided meditation and join Pastor Jeffrey for a virtual Sunday worship: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-982601> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Holy One, this Way You call us to is not easy, but it’s who we were created to be. Thank You for abiding with Your people, building us up into our true selves.

All: Guide us with every step, reminding us that we are not alone, but part of Your heart through the power of Your Spirit and the life of Your Son. Amen.

Reflection: Matthew 10:24-39; Romans 6:1-11

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

- Jesus presents both hardship and fear as part of the path for disciples, but also offers assurance of God’s love and power in the midst of said journey. What fears do we have, and how does Christ assure us to face them?
- How does grace challenge our mistakes and help change the narrative from “failure” to “victory?”
- Does Jesus saying he brings a “sword” mean that unity is not an option, or that the Gospel will bring conflict to the “peace” based on oppression and false control?

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.