

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.

Fifth Week of Pentecost

Monday, June 29

Read: 1 Kings 21:1-16

Reflection:

Scripture has many narratives like this reminding us of the power of greed. Ahab had no need of Naboth’s vineyard – but he *wanted* it. The prophet Samuel had warned Israel what a king would do to them: “he will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards...” (1 Samuel 8:14). Ahab became the exact archetype of what a king *opposed* to the Way of God would do.

The reality is that you do not need to be a king to act out of greed. It can happen to any of us – but what this text especially reminds us of what happens when *our* power gets used *wrongly*. We may not think it, but for most of us, we *do* have “power.” America is the richest nation in the world, and though it contains only 5% of the world’s population, it uses 24% of the world’s resources. Though our own economic situations may vary, the truth is – if we have a bank account, we’re head and shoulders above the rest of the world.

Instead of feeling guilty, let’s remember to use our power and privilege wisely and justly. When we see what our neighbors do and do not have, let’s not allow comparison to become a contest for acquisition. Let’s follow the way of our *true king*, Jesus, who did not use his power for selfish gain, but for selfless love: “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but *emptied* himself” (Philippians 2:6-7).

Prayer: *I may not be a king or a CEO, but I have power to do good for others. Help me to do so, and truly love my neighbor as myself. Amen.*

Tuesday, June 30

Read: 1 John 4:1-6

Reflection:

“Testing of the spirits” is an important practice for the Church in seeking to discern proper direction from God. Contextually, these words were offered to reinforce that Jesus really did live *and* die as a human being – he was flesh and blood, and he really did rise again, *in* the flesh. There were those who through the influence of Greek culture wanted to reject that the Messiah had ever been truly human at all, but only “disguised” as one.

This was a complete distortion of the biblical narrative, however – because God had always dealt with “the flesh.” Matter *matters* to God, and the Resurrection is about physicality – a renewed and *restored* physicality, but the world of creation nonetheless. The Greek mind separated flesh and spirit, but the Gospel affirmed that the Kingdom concerned *both*.

To “test the spirits” now might be to help combat against the false dualism of dividing “religious” or “spiritual” things from the world of flesh and blood. Some people may comment to keep things like politics and social issues “out” of the Church – but to do so rejects the Good News Jesus brought that placed *all things* under the sovereignty of God’s Kingdom.

Prayer: *Your life is in all things, O God – help me live in such a way where the only category of my life is labeled: “God’s Kingdom.” Amen.*

Wednesday, July 1

Read: Matthew 11:20-24

Reflection:

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were Jesus’ “home turf” – these were the local villages where he and his disciples spent a lot of their time and ministry. They were largely Jewish centers – fishing towns along the Galilee that also housed religious establishments. If anyone should’ve been quick to join in on the message Jesus was embodying, it should have been *these* communities. However, as we see from the text, they “did not repent” (v. 20).

Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were the cities of *foreigners* – much of the Jewish perception of these places was negative, due to their heavily Greek and Roman influence. However, Jesus makes the point of distinguishing locations such as these as “more tolerable” in terms of the coming judgment. This is part of Jesus’ habit of changing the familiar divisions of “insider/outsider.”

Sometimes, those of us on the “inside” of “religion” can miss the point of God’s Kingdom happening before our very eyes, simply because it’s all “too familiar.” We need the help of outsiders to shake us from complacency and open up a greater understanding of grace and transformation. Perhaps by listening closely to Jesus, we can see that the divisions of “insider/outsider” are not part of God’s Kingdom at all.

Prayer: *LORD, help me to never miss the extraordinary things You do, even within the familiar settings of the “inside” – by being open to grace, remind me that no one is “outside” Your love. Amen.*

Thursday, July 2

Read: Zechariah 1:1-6

Reflection:

Do we ever feel like we're stuck in the endless cycles of our forebearers? The mistakes we've made in the past, wrong turns our families may have taken, even sins that our communities have committed through the generations continue to play out in our present lives. It's easy to allow such history to become burdens that chain us to the past and feel like our futures are denied any hope from real change.

Yet we belong to a God who can change our wayward narratives. We belong to the Lord of the future and the Forgiver of our past. We don't have to feel trapped by what we have done and by what we have left undone. Confession is an embodiment of our leaning into the grace of God in such a way as to "name" those missteps where they no longer have power over us. God's new creation frees us from the past and opens to us a future of possibility.

History is an opportunity to learn *from* the past and to *grow* in the present towards a new future. We don't have to keep making the same mistakes – God can lead us into something *new*.

Prayer: *Forgive me of my past and guide me into Your future, O LORD. May I not be chained to my sin, but set free to live redeemed by Your love. Amen.*

Friday, July 3

Read: Zechariah 2:6-13

Reflection:

The Bible's "ending" is not with humanity escaping off to some fantasy land, but the Creator and Redeemer of the universe coming *to* us to dwell *with* us in renewed and restored creation. Throughout the biblical narrative, there are images of this final redemption in which heaven (God's space) and earth (our space) are united in everlasting communion.

This future hope is never divorced from the present – it is a powerful reassurance meant to equip the community of faith to press on, even amidst difficult circumstances. These words, like many of the other prophetic utterances, are shared with those who are smack dab in the middle of really trying and stressful times. In Zechariah's instance, a community fresh from exile, still wondering when their homeland would truly be "home" again.

Reminders of God's future are important for our work and worship. It can be difficult to sustain our continual pursuits of justice and peace in the present, but God's faithfulness will one day complete what we enact.

Prayer: *Sing and rejoice, O Church – for God's future is coming for our present. Amen.*

Saturday, July 4

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, July 5 – 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-555467> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts, You call us to follow You and experience true freedom in Your Kingdom.

All: Keep us faithful to the ways of Your Son, that, leaving behind all that hinders, we may fix our eyes on Christ and live boldly our redemption. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 145:8-18; Matthew 11:2-6, 28-30

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

- Instead of answering the question of John the Baptist’s disciples, Jesus points to his actions as confirmation of his identity: In what way is our discipleship the same?
- Jesus’ ministry is a matter of reconciliation, yet as we strive for that work, there is always the invitation to come to *Him* to receive what we need to be “whole.” Must we come to Jesus *first* before we can offer wholeness to the world?
- The words of the psalmist affirm what Jesus shows in his life: God “upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are owed down” (145:14). How does Jesus “raise up” your life and the lives of others?

The Lord’s Supper *(feel free to use whatever for the “bread” and “cup”)*

The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, he was with the disciples. And he took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, broken for you.” In the same manner, after they had supped, he took the cup, and after blessing it, he gave it to them, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me.”

The bread that we break is our communion with the Body of Christ. The cup of blessing which we drink is our communion with the Blood of Christ. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

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.**