

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.

First Week of Pentecost

Monday, June 1

Read: Joel 2:18-29

Reflection:

This word was originally spoken when the Jewish people were at their lowest: their land had been decimated by foreign powers, their sense of identity stripped from them – even their physical being had been transported to strange lands far from the normalcy of the Temple.

Yet the prophet Joel offered *hope* – hope that God had a future that would bring restoration where the world’s evils had only brought destruction. God would bring justice to those who had been denied it – God would transform the earth from brokenness to wholeness. The early Christians believed this future had broken into the world in Jesus. They saw this transformation begin to take place with the Resurrection.

They believed Christ had given his followers the Spirit to continue that restoration and healing until God’s Kingdom finally came. What better time is there for a reminder that God’s work is not done? What began in Christ’s life will continue in our own – and no earthly power, no army or disease or threat can ever dismantle that hope! The Spirit is our token of promise – it’s the bridge linking our present to God’s wondrous future.

Prayer: Hope lives in every believer, O God, because through Your Spirit, You’ve chosen to live in us. May we carry on with Resurrection hope in our Spirit-filled discipleship. Amen.

Tuesday, June 2

Read: Ezekiel 39:21-29

Reflection:

No matter how many times there are experiences of loss or brokenness, the final word from God is always one of restoration. It's easy to miss because so much of the Old Testament (and the New) come from contexts and cultures foreign to our own – but it's important to read these narratives in light of the great drama of redemption that is the Bible.

Any one of us can retell a story of sadness or pain – each of us has loss; during this pandemic, that truth only becomes clearer. Yet our stories are *not* done – not until God's final word of promise is spoken. Even what we believe may be an ending – God's future will continue our narratives in the promise of life everlasting.

Ezekiel's vision connected the disciples to their experience of Pentecost – of God's Spirit “filling” them in such a way that they could embrace Jesus' story in and through their own. Can we allow hope to be embodied in our discipleship during this season that we remain open to God's possibilities? Can we open ourselves to God's future that places a “comma” where we only believed a “period” belonged?

Prayer: *You're never done with me, LORD, not until Your Kingdom fully comes. Until then, keep me engaged in Your Spirit and holy possibility. Amen.*

Wednesday, June 3

Read: John 7:37-52

Reflection:

What do “rivers of living water” (v. 38) look like? The text makes the connection to the Holy Spirit – does this mean acts of power? Miraculous healings? Wonders that will testify to Jesus present *in* us “ordinary” disciples? Perhaps. Perhaps it could also mean those everyday “miracles” of kindness and goodwill, service and gentleness.

Perhaps in this season of disruption, it might look like patient endurance – the self-sacrificial love of Christ-followers putting the needs of the vulnerable and “at-risk” before our own comforts. As much as we long for our former normalcy, perhaps the wellsprings of the Spirit look like solidarity with the least in such a way that a “new normal” is fashioned where every life matters, no matter the economic impact.

Few believed in Jesus' authority because he spoke from the most ordinary and common of settings – yet that is exactly where God's Kingdom is needed the most. Not in the ivory towers of society – but the everyday lives of disciples willing to open the floodgates of Spirit-led love.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, flow through my life in the self-giving love of God in the simple miracles of daily discipleship. Amen.*

Thursday, June 4

Read: Job 38:1-11

Reflection:

When God “shows up” in the Bible, it’s generally to put us human beings in our place. We believe *we*’re the center of the universe, until the actual Center of the universe knocks us down a few pegs. During this pandemic, I’m sure many of us have had “Job” moments – where we’re crying out to the tempest around us: “where are you, God? Don’t you care? Aren’t you supposed to be in control?”

We should consider ourselves lucky that this scene is not God’s automatic reply for whenever those questions are asked – I think it’d be more terrifying than gratifying. Yet the text humbly reminds us that life really isn’t a matter of our control – there are many questions that will go unanswered in the face of the whirlwind, or as my grandmother would say: “this side of heaven.” As important as the choices we make are, and the manner in which we live our lives says much – God’s world is always *bigger* than our own. In the scheme of the universe, our problems are quite small.

Yet how marvelous is it that the same One who creates is also One who redeems? That this true Center of the universe would “stoop” to pay such attention to us miniscule human beings.

Prayer: *I have many questions, LORD. As much as I may demand an answer, gently remind me that rather than respond, You remain by my side instead. Your grace is enough. Amen.*

Friday, June 5

Read: 2 Timothy 1:8-12

Reflection:

Shame has little place in the life of a disciple. It rears its ugly head often, but that does not come from the Gospel. The “good news” of Jesus sets us free from guilt and shame – it transforms us from seeing the world through broken lenses and living renewed as God’s beloved. Even when we misstep, we should not allow shame a place at the table – as if God would “disprove” of our journey *towards* God’s Kingdom.

Discipleship concerns both justification (being saved) and sanctification (being made “holy”) – God’s Spirit makes both possible in our lives. We feel shame because our world still utilizes an ancient system of “honor-shame” – that “good” actions bring honor, and “bad” actions bring shame. Life is a balancing act between the two poles. Yet Jesus’ saving work in us tips the scales eternally in our favor. God doesn’t see a guilty people – God sees God’s own children.

Because of that grace, there’s only one way to truly live – and that is “free” – the freedom of being made whole, and thus, *able and willing* to live in gratitude for God’s gifts. That kind of gracious posture can face trials without fear – because shame is *not* Good News.

Prayer: *Life-giving Spirit, help me to embrace freedom, and to live truly redeemed. Amen.*

Saturday, June 6

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 7 – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m. – “Trinity Sunday”

Consider the guided meditation and join Pastor Jeffrey for a virtual Sunday worship: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-518508> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: O God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; come to us and be with us, as the wind to inspire us, the fire to cleanse us, the dew to refresh us. Come, O Three in One, unite us and bind us in love, unity in diversity, forever bound and eternally blessed.

All: Come, O God, unite Your people that we may respond to Your call for mission. Amen.

Reflection: Genesis 1-2:3; Acts 2:32-42

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

- The Church celebrates God’s identity as “Triune” – or Three Persons in One God, One in Three – a statement on how God chooses to relate to the world, through a relationship of “persons:” in light of this, how does our discipleship concern relationships?
- God’s Image is all about “relationship” – that God is not a set of beliefs or statements, but a *living* relationship to encounter and pursue: how does Peter’s charge to the Pentecost crowd commit to this?
- How does the Gospel move from Resurrection hope to Spirit-driven action?

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.