

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.

Seventh Week of Pentecost

Monday, July 13

Read: Psalm 142

Reflection:

There are many attestations in Scripture that affirm when *we* face weakness and vulnerability, God’s presence and power overcome. In other words, God’s ability to redeem is not dependent on our spiritual endurance. Particularly, the words of the psalmist remind us that God works *in spite* of our own (often) faulty actions.

In this historic moment where we may feel like there’s always *more* we can do – to combat this virus, societal ills, our own forms of prejudice and misunderstanding – we are going to run up against our own *insufficiency*. We are not “all-powerful” or “all-knowing.” We are beautifully, *limited* human beings. But as limited as we are, God remains open to our cries.

“When my spirit is faint, you know my way” (v. 3). Whether it’s exhaustion or defeat, we need not believe ourselves a “lost cause” to God. Such recognizable dependence may be exactly what God was inviting us into in the first place.

Prayer: *LORD, this season has made so many of us overwhelmed and feeling stuck in our limited-ness. Remind us and restore us through Your limitless love and power. Amen.*

Tuesday, July 14

Read: Micah 1:1-5

Reflection:

It’s strange to think that prophetic utterances like Micah’s were actually intended as “good news.” This declaration seems more like doomsday-sign-waving than gospel, but Micah was pointing Israel toward remembering God’s *redemptive* promises for all the world. Evil did not

have free reign over the earth – wickedness, cruelty, and greed would be met one day by God’s reconciling and *just* love. The prophets were called into this vision of God’s justice and declared it boldly to the people, particularly those who held the roles of leadership.

We can and should focus on individual actions and consequences, but the far more effective and wide-reaching work may be in *systemic* change and *corporate* responsibility. All of us can live in light of God’s love, but it is *together* that we will live as the Kingdom *community* God formed us to be. And lest we should think that God’s grace means we’re “off the hook,” then we should take a closer look at Cross and Resurrection.

God chose to meet the world’s evil with God’s own heart – God faced cruelty with love, and love won over worldly death through Resurrection. It’s not “fire and brimstone,” but it’s the first sign that our evil will *not* go unanswered. God has begun judgment through Jesus Christ, and God’s justice will continue until all the world has been restored.

Prayer: *Your grace abounds, O LORD, but help us not to be on the wrong side of justice. We already stood once on the wrong side of the Cross – help us live through Resurrection. Amen.*

Wednesday, July 15

Read: Matthew 13:10-17

Reflection:

Isn’t it frustrating that Jesus’ “answers” to the disciples’ questions, just make us ask *more* questions? Why is Jesus so elusive – why doesn’t he just come on out and say what God’s Kingdom is all about and how we “get in?” Jesus pulled from the prophets often to help illustrate his point, and this text from Isaiah only reinforces that the “easy way” is *not* God’s Way. In fact, those who thought that because they were supposedly on the “inside” of the community should’ve had it easier than those “outside,” ended up even *further* from the truth.

Perhaps faith isn’t supposed to be such a clear-cut answer – maybe the questions and the searching is *part* of the process of discipleship. A disciple is a student, after all. If that might cause us to slink in our chairs, then hear again how Jesus ends his lesson: “Blessed are *your* eyes, for they see” (v. 16).

As important as it is for us to journey, Jesus makes it known that what we are encountering on the path *is* the Kingdom of God. God *wants* to be found, so much so that God actually comes *to* us. It’s definitely not easy to search, but Jesus said that was the way to God: “Everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:8).

Prayer: *May we not grow tired of knocking, LORD, for we trust You are just as eager to open the door to us in welcome. Amen.*

Thursday, July 16

Read: Isaiah 44:1-5

Reflection:

People often get stuck in the “violence” of the Old Testament, thus skipping to the “good stuff” in the New. Yet to do so misses the *same* God who gave us Jesus. The God of the New Testament is the *same* God who *remained* with Israel, who were as rebellious and violent as any of the nations we see *today*, all the while dealing with their sin by promising restoration. To separate the Old Testament from the New is to attempt to separate grace from real life.

The world and story Jesus inhabited was the continuing testament of Israel, on behalf of all humanity, to bring about God’s promises from texts like Isaiah, offering true healing and redemption. “I will pour water on the thirsty land...I would pour my spirit upon your descendants” (v. 3). It is this resilient and faithful love we see God enacted with Israel that is later claimed by Jesus for all the world to experience.

We need to hold onto the *whole* narrative of Scripture, because in its beautiful complexity we see the complexity of the human race exhibited. And abiding in and through that complexity, is a God of grace and love. The God of the Old *and* the New Testament.

Prayer: *You are our rock, O LORD, You alone and no other. May we listen to this proclamation from the whole of Your story – Genesis through Revelation. Amen.*

Friday, July 17

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Reflection:

One of the biggest objections to Christianity is its own hypocrisy: how can a tradition so intent on “policing” purity in the world at the same time have such distortion within its own community? At different points in time, the Christian faith focused on different aspects of purity – bodily, spiritually, socially, individually.

Perhaps we should start with the very first line: “in the Lord Jesus” (v. 1) – Jesus shows us that holiness is singular dedication to God and neighbor. People called Jesus a glutton because he spent all his time with the supposed *impure* – he drank wine and spent time with tax collectors! Yet he loved his neighbors and loved God absolutely.

Perhaps our purity is in our abstaining from hate and violence – holiness comes from our devotion to Christ exhibited in our care and treatment of our neighbors. We cease being “me first” kind of people and seek to be Christlike in living “other-centered.”

Prayer: *May we ground ourselves in You, O Christ, that through You we may love God purely. Amen.*

Saturday, July 18

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 19 – 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-482405> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of Wonder, though we may struggle to see Your work in the world or acknowledge Your Presence among us, do not cease revealing Your grace to us, especially where we least expect it.

All: Surprise us with Your love, O LORD, that we may respond to such care with gratitude and offer ourselves humbly in the work of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Reflection: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

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

- The angels “ascending and descending” shows how “porous” God’s space (heaven) and our space really are – how might they make us aware of God’s ability to “touch” our lives, no matter “where” we are?
- God’s Presence is often “before” us in most places, but we must become “aware” of it – what are things we can do to grow our awareness of God?
- Does Jesus invite us to cease our “hiding” from God and live fully in the “house” 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.