

## **Daily Devotional During “Social Distancing”**

*The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” Following the Spirit of the Living God into the world, we live in the period known as “Ordinary Time” – the growing space between Pentecost and Advent. 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. May the Church grow ever deeper into the love and hope of God.*

### **“Ordinary Time” (Growing Season)**

#### **Monday, July 20**

Read: Genesis 32:3-21

Reflection:

Have you ever tried to delay the inevitable – trying to throw everything you could in front of a problem in order to put off having to become involved *yourself*? It seems as if this is what Jacob is doing in our text: he sends his entire family and company ahead of him, offering gifts and tributes to his brother, hoping that such a show of deference will sate Esau’s vengeance. In desperation, Jacob prays to God, holding in tension God’s promise of faithfulness and the reality of this coming and potentially-threatening encounter.

If you read on in this narrative, it seems as if God *doesn’t* answer Jacob’s prayer, as Jacob *does* have to face Esau himself, alone and without any further delays of encounter. However, Esau does *not* destroy Jacob as he fears, but *embraces* him. The inevitable that Jacob feared did not come to pass, but rather, the inevitable of God’s *reconciliation* did.

Forgiveness is not easy, and can be painful – but we should not try and prolong or delay its inevitability in our lives. We should trust that God will deliver us from evil, but God will also be with us *through* situations that transform us for “good.”

Prayer: *LORD, there are things that scare me, of which I try and run from and avoid with all my might...but when the time for encounter comes, may I trust that You will be there, too. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, July 21**

Read: Psalm 75

Reflection:

The psalms continually uplift God's judgment as something to be *praised* – that with all the injustice in this world, the only true remedy is the rule of the LORD. While much of Scripture testifies to this being part of the Kingdom of God *fully* come, there is also room for God's "present" reign of justice.

For God's Name to be "near" means God's presence is *not* "far" from people's experiences or understanding. God "sees" the hurt and longing of the world, and works through the Spirit to bring transformation even now. Some of that transformation may simply be in the acts of repentance that are possible for any of us: to acknowledge our sin and turn *towards* God. Some of it may be in how *we* work for goodness and righteousness now.

We can praise God that, in spite of all our efforts, *God* will one day bring true judgment to all the earth. Every wrong, every sorrow, every shred of brokenness – God will fully and finally reconcile. Indeed, our participation in this restoration now will be made "complete" in that glorious future. The Resurrection is the foretaste of justice God unleashed upon creation.

Prayer: *I will rejoice forever, O God, because You do and will judge this world with love and justice – and the work of Your Church gets to share in that present and future work. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, July 22**

Read: Matthew 12:15-21

Reflection:

People who experienced Jesus, believed they experienced what the prophets had foretold through their sacred scriptures. In other words, Jesus embodied the deep longing of God's people to be answered with God's presence and power. People saw their history come to life in Jesus, transforming their present with hope for the future.

Is this part of what the Church is called to do in its *own* life? When people experience the Church, that is, the people of God, living into their call to be disciples of Christ – do they encounter the *embodiment* of God's presence and power? Notice that the words Jesus affirmed through Isaiah centered on humble workings of God's justice – Jesus lived the expression of love and faithfulness that Israel believed to be God *with* them.

Can the Church point to Jesus in its awareness and interaction with the community? When people see the Church can they see in our words and deeds the *living* God – the God that Jesus offered in his own life, death and resurrection? Jesus was dedicated totally to revealing God for people to encounter – do we share that level of commitment towards revealing Christ?

Prayer: *It's not about "us," LORD, even as we talk about the Church. Remind us to point to You, in everything that we do, so people may encounter the love and wholeness Your Word has proclaimed to be found in You alone. Amen.*

## Thursday, July 23

Read: Zephaniah 3:8-13

Reflection:

God is in the business of transformation – not just in the “future,” but *right now* in the daily venture of growing and changing us to *be* God’s people. What we were meant for in the beginning – to be Image-bearers of God – we squander through our rebellion of sin. Yet God has not ceased God’s commitment to us, thus our history has been one long journey of God working on us to be true to that identity and vocation.

It gives me great hope to think of myself (and all humankind) as a work “in progress.” That God would be so willing to form and shape us in the ways of love and grace is more a testament to *God’s* patience than our own. It may help us to consider faith as a journey rather than a single point on a timeline or scale. It’s okay not to be “there” when thinking about our knowledge of God or practice of discipleship, because by God’s grace, we will *grow*.

God promises restoration to a broken world: *we* are part of that restoration, because *we* are part of that brokenness. Yet God remains faithfully patient in loving us into wholeness – maybe this allows us to be more patient with each other (and ourselves) in our redemption, too.

Prayer: *On that day, we will no longer be beautiful and broken, just beautiful. Until that day, may we live by hope in You, and give grace with one another. Amen.*

## Friday, July 24

Read: Acts 7:44-53

Reflection:

Stephen, a newfound convert to Jesus, is brought before the religious authorities because he will *not* cease his testimony for Christ. When he is put on trial, Stephen *continues* his testimony, utilizing the whole of biblical history to remind the authorities that *no one* “owns” God.

Part of the power (and disruption) of Jesus the Messiah was in his opening up access to God’s presence *beyond* any human authority. Jesus revealed God’s Kingdom *in* and *through* human life and invited *all* people to encounter that holy possibility. When confronted by those same authorities, Stephen reminded them of that which their own history had testified to: “The Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands” (v. 48).

Sometimes the only thing keeping us “from” God is our *own* refusal to see the Spirit of Jesus before our very eyes. May we be like Stephen and learn from our history that God is always drawing us into communion and that Jesus was the fulfillment of this love and invitation.

Prayer: *Open the eyes of my heart, LORD, I want to see what Jesus saw: You. Amen.*

## Saturday, July 25

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 26 – 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-345477> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: LORD, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life – You are the very life that we long for.

**All: May we seek in faith to discover daily the treasures of Your Kingdom among us, uncovering Your loving Presence in and through our discipleship. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Psalm 105:1-11; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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

- In what ways may the “seeds” of discipleship grow to lengths that surprise us with their blessing? What are the “mustard seeds” of your own journey?
- Does the blessing come from the *searching* itself or from what the search uncovers?
- Do you think Jesus is trying to reveal the accessibility of God’s Kingdom or direct our discipleship to focus on the realm of God in and through the “ordinary” of life? Does there have to be a single answer?

### 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.**