

## **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 27**

Read: James 3:13-18

Reflection:

The writer of this letter offered two portraits of “wisdom.” Both portraits are clearly painted by the *actions* of those worldviews. One was grounded in “peace, gentleness...mercy and good fruits” (v. 17) – the other, “envy and selfish ambition” (v. 16). Before posing the question, which sounds more like the Kingdom of God, can we *first* answer – which one do we spend the majority of our lives under?

Acknowledging our brokenness is not meant to incur further guilt and wallow in self-pity. It’s about recognizing what God’s Kingdom is *not* about – it’s turning *outward* that inward devotion. The world prizes strength and power and accumulation – the wisdom of God says the true blessing lies in how we surrender and offer up *for* others.

These words were an anchor to the Christian communities James wrote to, because it reminded them that the wisdom of God was made most visible in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The offering of the Son of God showed them how humans could truly embrace God’s Kingdom.

Prayer: *May my life be found in the wisdom offered by Christ – gentle and grace-filled mercy for my neighbors versus complete centering on self. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, July 28**

Read: Matthew 12:38-42

Reflection:

Have you ever wondered why Jesus used the story of Jonah as a “sign” for what his ministry was about? At first glance, we hear “Jonah” and think of impending destruction of Nineveh – or as

Jesus relates, the three days and nights in the belly of the great fish. Yet if we reread the story of Jonah, it is a narrative ending in *grace*. Nineveh is *not* destroyed because its people repent – yet *Jonah* is the one who is greatly disturbed by God’s forgiveness.

Did Jesus see that same refusal to embrace God’s redemption in the community around him? Would Jesus see that same “sign of Jonah” in us today? Are we upset by who God extends grace to? Do we understand that it is the “Nineveh’s” of the world, the supposed “unforgiveable enemies” that seem to grasp God’s love far better than the “chosen community?”

Jesus reminds people that *he* is “greater” than the proclamation of Jonah – Jesus is *greater* than the wisdom of Solomon. Jesus shows us a God without limits or barrier – a God intent on restoration for *all*. What “sign” would Jesus give us, and would we understand if he presented one – especially if it reminded us of our stubborn refusal for redemption?

Prayer: *May I hold dear that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, always willing to relent from punishment (Jonah 3:2). Amen.*

## **Wednesday, July 29**

Read: Mark 4:30-34

Reflection:

What are the “mustard seeds” of your faith journey? What are the seemingly little things that were planted through worship, service, education, and other areas of discipleship that now have become “trees of blessing?” What surprises you most when you look back at the overwhelmingly, *ordinary* moments that were the gateways into God’s extraordinary grace?

This parable is an important reminder that no facet of life is ever too small for God’s love to transform. There is nothing too minimal for God’s concern or God’s Kingdom. The “smallest” pieces of ourselves may be just the seeds for Jesus’ ministry to take hold and bring blessing to us and the world.

The Church is a community *full* of mustard seeds – at first glance, it’s a seemingly-random collection of ordinary people, with small lives and maybe even smaller abilities. Yet God sees the beginning of the great forests of ministry, spreading forth the growth of the Kingdom.

Prayer: *My life is not small to You, O LORD – help me live with that potential always at the ready. Amen.*

## **Thursday, July 30**

Read: Philippians 4:10-15

Reflection:

Contentment is a fleeting pursuit in our world. Many seek to be satisfied through various means, but there's plenty of testimonials that contentment remains elusive. The writer shares their perspective on contentment: a *process* grounded in the presence and power of God – "I can do all things through him that strengthens me" (v. 13).

We may go through various levels of economic standing in our lives, but our true value comes from Christ. This perspective allows us to define contentment not by the world's standards but by the value system of the Kingdom of God. When you live through the lens of being "God's beloved," it really doesn't matter "what" you have. You already *have* the greatest gift of all.

Economic distress is *real*, but being "content" in God's love may allow us a more grateful stance with ourselves and the world. When we don't need to "own" our way through life, we're freer to focus on the relationships that are the resources in God's Kingdom.

Prayer: *Money matters, God, but remind me that Your love matters most of all. Living through Your grace, help me act graciously and find contentment in You. Amen.*

## **Friday, July 31**

Read: 1 Kings 3:16-28

Reflection:

The LORD gave Solomon wisdom not for his own grandeur, but for distribution of "justice." This episode may be one instance of what God's justice looks like – "cutting" through the illusion of selfish gain for the wellbeing of others. Solomon recognizes that the true mother is *not* willing to sacrifice the child for mere control, and thus grants her custody.

Jesus noted that his message of God's Kingdom was "greater" than Solomon's wisdom. Solomon did execute justice, but he also built up his own palaces and took many wives – creating an empire of "self" instead of a nation of blessing *for* others. Jesus rejected empire-building to offer up his *own* life to exhibit God's justice.

God's justice should never be "just for us." Jesus extended his arms to embrace *all* the world on the Cross – God's justice was that death did *not* win that day or ever again. In what ways can we continue in the tradition of Jesus, seeking to exhibit God's justice through blessing of others?

Prayer: *Solomon was very wise, but wisdom can easily turn selfish. May we trust the greater wisdom of Jesus, and follow in the way of Cross and Resurrection. Amen.*

## Saturday, August 1

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, August 2 – 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-737749> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: O God, giver of life and health, Your Son Jesus has called us to hunger and thirst to see Your Kingdom prevail. Refresh us with Your grace, that we may not be weary in doing good.

**All: Through Your love that meets our needs, may we be empowered with holy kindness to share the bread of our lives with the world. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Matthew 14:13-21

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

- Have you considered that when Jesus came ashore and saw the crowds he had a choice – embrace them with compassionate service or move on? What do Jesus’ action mean for our Kingdom response?
- If the disciples’ discomfort with the crowds and their desire to send them “away” represents the world’s solutions to people’s “hunger,” what may we perceive from Jesus’ words: “They need not go away” (v. 16)?
- What hope is there in Jesus’ ability to produce abundance where the world declares “scarcity?”

### 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.**