

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.

Sixth Week of Pentecost

Monday, July 6

Read: Song of Solomon 2:8-13

Reflection:

When was the last time you actually read *through* the Song of Solomon? They don’t talk about *this* in Sunday School very often, do they? Yet here it is – such *sensual* and ecstatic love poetry that when we consider through ancient language what the writers are talking about, we might blush, if we weren’t so indoctrinated to modern media. You have to be careful, even for a marriage ceremony, which verses you select from this love song, lest you want giggles from the bridal party.

Yet ancient communities of Jews *and* Christians maintained this literature in their sacred libraries for the very same way we may read it today: God *loves* us. Wholly and entirely – God is a fierce lover, committed to abiding with us and pursuing us into eternal communion. That’s a love song we should rejoice in – and it is Good News for those of us who feel as if our bodies aren’t “holy” enough for God.

Bodies, and what we do with them, are very holy to God – and so as sensual as these depictions are, they remind us that God is no “snob.” Our physical lives are important vessels for the Kingdom: as passionately as God pursues us, *we* do the same *for* God.

Prayer: *Arise, my Love, and come to me – be part of my life forever as I am part of You. Amen.*

Tuesday, July 7

Read: Jeremiah 27

Reflection:

The prophets, as in tuned to God's heart as they were, also were called to present *difficult* words from time to time. Especially when the community of faith was so entrenched in a rebellious spirit that any "good news" had to be cracked over their heads like a hammer, God used the prophets as a mean to show them that actions had consequences.

Jeremiah is called to place a yoke upon himself to portray the "yoke" that the people of Israel had willingly placed upon themselves in rejecting God's promises and pursuing their own way. It's an important reminder that as much as we like to think we know better, sometimes our decisions only lead us deeper into bondage. The things that weigh us down in life we may believe we can free ourselves by our own methods; there's whole sections of bookstores devoted to "self-help."

There are some chains that *only* God can free us from – and it's the part of the prophetic call of the Church to commit ourselves to that liberation against the world's forms of escapism. Repentance is not easy – but the freedom of God's heart is lighter than sin's yoke.

Prayer: *LORD, we so often think we can fix any problem that comes our way – but my own brokenness often just digs a worse hole. Help me to follow Your way – even when it leads down strange paths. At the end of repentance always comes restoration in You. Amen.*

Wednesday, July 8

Read: John 13:1-17

Reflection:

I find it poetic that when Jesus knew his "hour had come" (v. 1) he chose to bless his disciples with an act of humble service. He could have done many things in that moment: The Messiah could have revealed some articulate plan of action or shared the great wisdom of the Spirit. Instead, he knelt before them and washed their feet.

For all our talk of Bible study and Sunday School, maybe Christians could stand to learn the most from just following Jesus' lead and offering ourselves to our neighbors. Maybe foot-washing is not what we're being asked to repeat, but the act of "dealing with our neighbor's dirt" – entering into a vulnerable enough position where our power and privilege are not "above" our neighbors. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he set aside his authority as a teacher and shared in the mundaneness that is common to all humanity: to journey anywhere, we all have to take the first step.

There are a lot of people with dusty and sore feet from this difficult season. Maybe the Church could shrug off some of its "authority," and simply take a knee before its neighbors and offer to wash away some weariness.

Prayer: *The greatest teaching You have offered, O LORD, may simply be that we have everything we need to love each other. We just need reminders to kneel and serve. Amen.*

Thursday, July 9

Read: Psalm 119:105-112

Reflection:

A lamp is a useful tool, especially when you're trying to find your way. It's interesting to note this label – that God's words are like a light but *not* the path. What is the path then, we might ask? Psalm 37:5 in the Hebrew says, "Roll your way *upon* the LORD" – it is *God* who is the Way. God's Word acts like a light to reveal for us more closely who God is and what God does.

Using Scripture to find our way through God's Kingdom is important, but only in the Word Made Flesh may we truly grasp God *in* our humanity. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection we see when the path of God stretches through the fullness of human existence. Jesus shows us what happens when the light reveals God most clearly – Jesus takes Scripture and puts it to flesh.

Knowing God's commands and God's Story is vital, but knowing what all these words mean when they are embodied in a human life of faithful discipleship is even greater.

Prayer: *Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, O God, and Thy Son is the light that illumines Your Kingdom in us all. Amen.*

Friday, July 10

Read: Deuteronomy 32:1-10

Reflection:

Before the new generation of Israel can enter the promised land, Moses declares to them their own history, reminding them of their identity as God's people. This is where the title "Deuteronomy" comes from – "2nd Law" meaning the re-iteration of God's commands given at Mount Sinai to the newly-liberated slaves from Egypt, now provided to their offspring forty years later.

This proclamation of story/testimony is a model for what most worship gatherings entail: it's an opportunity to hear again the words of our faith. Every gathering constitutes a "new generation" – another chance before setting out to seek the "promised land" of Kingdom discipleship. Worship invites us into our own story to reclaim our pasts, present, and futures for God. Worship is really about sustaining our identity as God's people – through word and deed we know *who* we are and *Whose* we are.

Even though this season feels like we're stuck in the wilderness, every opportunity – whether virtual, indoors or outdoors, alone or together – is a chance to hear again our story and proclaim: "Greatness to our God!" (v. 3)

Prayer: *Faithful are You, O God, the Rock of each and every generation. Amen.*

Saturday, July 11

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 12 – 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-191389> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Almighty God, we thank You for planting in us the seeds of Your Kingdom. By Your Spirit, help us receive it with joy and work to produce fruits of grace for Your world.

All: May we live in Christ’s Way, that we may grow in faith, hope and love to the glory of Your Name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 65:9-13; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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

- God’s Spirit empowers creation to “produce” fruits of God’s Kingdom – how do we see the ebb and flow of the seasons in our own discipleship?
- What kinds of “fruit” are we producing from our discipleship? Are we tilling a communal soil that is open to healthy growth?
- What are the “weeds” that choke out discipleship for God’s Kingdom in your life?

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.