

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, August 10

Read: Psalm 28

Reflection:

Have our voices gone dry in pleading with the LORD for deliverance in this season? Have our prayers ceased because we fear God may not be *listening*? As the virus continues, tensions remain high, and the world still looks like the world – violent, hurt, and difficult – are we worried that perhaps God is absent?

Notice that while the psalmist is earnest in their pleading – a great urgency and authenticity to their cries – there is no sign of worry that God will not *answer*. In fact, the psalmist assumes that their cries are heard, and that the LORD is already at work in the world – despite what may be visible through the senses – God is *working*.

A shepherd is not always visible to the sheep – sometimes it may seem like the sheep are alone in the pasture. But the Good Shepherd *is* nearby, ready to carry when little lambs faint or are caught up in the thorns.

Prayer: *Blessed be You, O LORD, for You hear the sound of my pleadings, and act as a saving refuge for the weary. May I sing that good news for the world, and never fear Your nearness. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 11

Read: Matthew 8:23-27

Reflection:

I take strange comfort in knowing that Jesus was a heavy sleeper. I too, when I am deeply asleep, can slumber through the worst of storms. For myself, it’s not because I am free of worry,

but because I have a wonderfully-comfortable mattress. For Jesus, however, I believe it was because he did *not* worry – at least in the great scheme of things.

I'm sure had he been awake he would have been unsettled by the storm. He may have felt the anxiety of clouds and rising waves – but Jesus did not fear oblivion. Jesus knew that he mattered to God – that the whole world was so dearly loved by God, he could “rest” even in the most trying of surroundings. Perhaps it was because Jesus understood that the Way of God did not avoid the storms of life, but led directly *through* them.

We don't have to wake God up to our troubles. God is right there *in the midst* of them beside us. Perhaps God may be waking *us* up to the reality that the Kingdom leads through the Cross – but no matter the storm, God promises Resurrection on the other side.

Prayer: *May we never forget that the winds and waves of life are rebuked by Your voice, O God – and even if we get a little wet in the process, we need not be afraid. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 12

Read: Isaiah 45:20-25

Reflection:

The prophets do not mince words when it comes to where we decided to put our trust. Anything *other* than the LORD is an “idol” – something without “true” power and instead of salvation, they will more or less bring us *further* imprisonment. The things that we own, the resources we try and build up, the relationships we manipulate – whether it is a physical thing or a social identity – these things may burden us with their power rather than granting us the liberty and value we believe they possess. Only God may bring true *freedom*.

This was an important word to the Jews in their period of Exile – as they were separated from all forms of their identity as God's people, the prophets reminded them that *only* the God who had *made* them could also *redeem* them. This word is just as important now – when we may attempt to fill the empty spaces in our lives with many things – but the *LORD alone restores us*.

When we allow the life of God to form and shape us, all those false idols fall by the wayside and we see what a life truly *unburdened* looks like. It's a continual process – lifelong even – but God has offered a word that “will not return” (v. 23) until we are set free from all chains.

Prayer: *Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength – keep my eyes fixed on You that I may see the world through You.. Amen.*

Thursday, August 13

Read: Revelation 15:1-4

Reflection:

Revelation is less a “blueprint for the future” and more a subversive, retelling of the *present* that early Christians used to provide hope in the midst of oppression. The language we read as hymns of praise *to* God, were actually rewritten tributes to *Caesar*. Early Christians took these words and offered them back to believers as if to say: Honor the *true* LORD of All – Christ, *not* Caesar.

These “visions” were a way to pull back the curtain on the visible realities and offer Christians hope *beyond* their surroundings to what was taking place in the Divine Realm. The Lamb who was slain was not defeated but sat on the throne of heaven! Believers who had perished were not gone forever, but already part of God’s future and were worshiping even now!

It’s that kind of hope we must continue today. “Behind” the curtain of the world is the space of God ready to fill the space of earth with Jesus’ full and unfiltered reign. Until that day, we continue to sing, no matter our surroundings: “Great and amazing are your deeds, LORD God Almighty” (v. 3).

Prayer: *Keep us singing, O God, until Your future becomes fully our present. Amen.*

Friday, August 14

Read: Matthew 14:34-36

Reflection:

Have we lost that simple desire to just reach out and “touch” Jesus? Not physically, of course – that connection was not possible even before COVID-19; but what about the deep, *spiritual* embrace of Jesus’ life? In this time of physical distancing, how can we regain that longing?

Perhaps it doesn’t have to be through mere worship “services” – what about aiding our neighbors in need? Perhaps “touching” Jesus might be to encounter those Jesus devoted *his* ministry to – the hurt, sick, lonely, and outcast. Perhaps to “touch” the life of Jesus may be to take hold of the power of God bringing wholeness where this world has sown division.

A disciple is not just a student, following after their master-teacher. Perhaps a disciple is also one who believes that in Jesus there is such hope and meaning for their life, they will do whatever they must to be close to that presence.

Prayer: *Gracious God, I believe in Christ You have given this world such life, that simply brushing up against Your wisdom brings healing. May I not just reach out and “touch” Your life, but embrace it fully as a disciple and witness to Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Saturday, August 15

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 16 – 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-412625> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Glorious Creator, You bless us beyond the limitations of space and time, entering our lives from the unexpected and ordinary. Help us to be open to Your Voice, and respond in faith.

All: Speak that we may answer, O God, and guide our response to honor Your Kingdom in our daily discipleship. Amen.

Reflection: Isaiah 56:1-8; Matthew 15:21-28

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

- How does God use the “stranger” or “foreigner” to transform the perspectives of those on the “inside?”
- God’s concern for the “outsider” is apparent throughout Scripture – how might we exhibit that concern in our own discipleship?
- What are the ways God’s love has surprised you or changed the way you viewed the world and/or viewed 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.