

## **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 31**

Read: Psalm 83:1-4, 13-18

Reflection:

This is a clear example of the cry of the desperate for God to *act*. While the aim of that action may seem violent to our modern ears, we must remember that the ancient context comes from a people oppressed by dominant powers and pushed to the margins of society.

A lament like Psalm 83 may be a “comfort” to us because it should serve as an invitation that no matter the desperation we feel or the grim outlook of our circumstances, God is listening. No prayer is “off limits” to the God who created us and has promised to redeem us and all the world. We can bring our anger, our demand for justice, our cry for action – most of all, we can bring our *pain*, and boldly offer it to God.

There’s no guarantee of “how” God will answer – but we may trust that God’s Kingdom brings restoration. The only “violence” that God is intent upon is the absorption of all brokenness into God’s own heart so that God’s love may win out in the end. When we pray, don’t feel pressured to “act nice” before God – just be *real*. The more “open” our hearts are, the more God’s love may pour in to fill them.

Prayer: *Don’t keep silent, O God, because this world needs Your redemption now – if You would speak, speak through the Kingdom testimony of Your Church. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, September 1**

Read: Exodus 5:15-6:13

Reflection:

Liberation is never easy. When those with power are confronted with relinquishing their power, there is always opposition. This is partly why freedom is so valuable – it is *never* “free.” Even the grace of God is “costly,” because it asks us to live by our value in the Kingdom of God versus the world’s economy.

Moses declared that slavery was not compatible with God’s Kingdom, but Pharaoh could not have his kingdom without it – so he raised the stakes. Pharaoh made the lives of the Hebrew people even worse, so that they would resent Moses’ efforts at liberation. Yet precisely when we reach the “brick wall” (no pun intended) of worldly opposition, we must remember that the LORD, and the LORD alone, is God.

“I am the Lord, and I will free you” (Exodus 6:6) – this is the *Gospel*, and with such “good news,” we cannot turn back at the first sign of difficulty. We press on, trusting in our Liberating God to fulfill the promise of redemption. In the end, Pharaoh may rage and roar like a lion, but the Lamb alone is King forever.

Prayer: *You hear Your people in distress, and You work to save. As we celebrate and trust in this grace, help us to continue the work of freedom, even when we face opposition. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, September 2**

Read: Matthew 12:22-32

Reflection:

When authorities and skeptics saw what Jesus was doing, they called him “crazy.” They claimed he was doing such wonders *not* by God’s power, but by *demons*. Yet Jesus argued that if he was *fighting* evil, how could evil be part of his ministry? This is an important word for the Church after years of denominations and divisions – if our ministry is grounded in Jesus, then how can *disunity* or *disfunction* be part of our work?

If we claim to be about God’s business, we need to make sure that “evil” has no place at the table. All of us have sin, but when the Church blatantly engages in brokenness and strife, we are making void the commission of Jesus. This is what Jesus claimed was “unforgiveable” – a “dampening” of God’s work in the world through the Spirit.

Hateful speech and actions, discrimination, and any and all “-ism’s” out there that diminish and demean the Image of God in all persons must be clear from our ministry lest we reveal that we’re really not on the “side” of Jesus. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (v. 30).

Prayer: *Keep us in line with Your mission, O LORD, that we may not scatter Your seeds of love but help plant them in persons and communities to the flourishing of Your Kingdom. Amen.*

## **Thursday, September 3**

Read: Jeremiah 17:5-18

Reflection:

The trees outside the church building are so tall and glorious, but it's their roots that really make their splendor possible. Embedded deep within the soil and spread out wide to gather as much water as possible, the roots are the firm foundation for every mighty, wooden giant. The same can be said for our relationships with God: if our faith is planted deep within the soil of tradition and Scripture and spread wide to soak up the Holy Spirit through community and discipleship, then we'll stand tall and strong in the light of God's Kingdom.

Growth and gardening are great parallels to faith because they reveal the continual process of refinement and attention needed to persevere. Our spiritual lives must not only be nourished by study, service, worship, and community but also by continual connection to the enrichment of God's love and care.

Even if we don't have a "green thumb," God is our faithful gardener who watches over us, careful to prune our lives so we can continue to grow. Yet we must not forsake those "living waters" (v. 13) – even under God's care, without "water," we will not live long.

Prayer: *May I ever grow up into Your love and grace, O God – that I may be nourished through Your Word and Spirit so I can provide fruit and shade for Your world. Amen.*

## **Friday, September 4**

Read: Matthew 23:29-36

Reflection:

Hypocrisy is not a good look for the religious community. It's why Jesus was so harsh with the Pharisees and scribes, and also, why that same rhetoric must be heeded by *us*. We cannot claim to hold knowledge of God and then fail to exhibit that knowledge in our words and deeds.

The reason hypocrisy is so deadly to the Church is because once the Church has shown to be *untrue* by both word and act, it's extremely difficult to remedy that without *greater* word and act. Once the Church has failed to live into "All are Welcome" written on our doors and signs, it's hard for anyone to trust that they really *are* "welcome."

We must never cease trying to remain true to who God has called us to be, especially by how we both speak *and* act. If we can earn the trust of our neighbors not only by what we say, but by what we do – then we are one step closer to honoring the One we claim as our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: *Keep us true to You, O God, that we not be caught by hypocrisy and lose the trust of Your people. Amen.*

## Saturday, September 5

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, September 6 – 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-567887> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: Holy and gracious God, we praise You for what the Table of Jesus signifies: Your victory over our brokenness, Your love bringing us life.

**All: As we gather round this symbol, may we offer ourselves for one another, further embodying the gift You have given us by giving it to each other. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149

**The Lord’s Supper** (*feel free to use whatever for the “bread” and “cup”*)

*The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, he was with the disciples. And he took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, broken for you.” In the same manner, after they had supped, he took the cup, and after blessing it, he gave it to them, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me.”*

**The bread that we break is our communion with the Body of Christ. The cup of blessing which we drink is our communion with the Blood of Christ. These are the gifts of God for the people 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.**