

# COMPILATION OF DEVOTIONALS: 7/27-8/30

## 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 “unforgivable 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, 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.**

## **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 3**

Read: Acts 2:37-47

Reflection:

Jesus creates *community*. This is what we see when all the various people gathered in Jerusalem on that Pentecost day long ago experienced Christ’s life through the Holy Spirit. In a season where it may feel like our sense of community is fractured or restricted or just not “the same,” it’s so important to remember that the work of Jesus’s Spirit *sustains* us in such disparity.

It may not look like what we’re used to, but again, the power of Jesus’ life in us makes the impossible “possible.” People who had nothing in common suddenly shared “all things in common” (v. 44). People who had no inkling of hope or grace miraculously experienced in one another “glad and generous hearts” (v. 46). Community is what the Church *does*.

It may not be “together” in a building, but we can certainly be “together” in our ministry of grace and love. We can hold in common the preservation and respect for life, protection of the most vulnerable, and continue to work for God’s Kingdom wherever we may be found.

*Prayer: Lord of life, may Your Spirit fill us so that we devote ourselves to Christ, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, whether or not we do these things in a sanctuary or out in the street. You make us one, now and always. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, August 4**

Read: Matthew 15:32-39

Reflection:

I think the real miracle of Jesus feeding the four thousand is not so much the multiplication of resources, but that Jesus *sees* and *answers* “need.” It was not just that people were hungry and

needed to be fed – Jesus worried that they would not make it home safe without nourishment. Jesus was able to look beyond immediate concerns to a larger picture – seeing the interconnectedness of people’s lives and the pain and fear that shackled them.

Jesus saw this web of human life and declared “I have compassion for the crowd” (v. 32). Jesus met the limitation of the world with the abundance of his love, offering his own life in the face of scarcity and sorrow. The real miracle with the loaves and fishes is that Jesus takes the things that are so ordinary to us in life – a meal, a conversation, a crowd – and says: “God’s Kingdom is *here*.” The Messiah then turns the mission of nourishment and communion over to *us*.

We may not be asked to feed the hungry or make sure people have what they need to journey safely home, but we certainly are tasked with sharing the abundance of God’s love. Sometimes that may look like actually feeding people and providing rest for the weary. Most times, however, it may look like just seeing the larger picture of people’s lives and offering what blessing *we’ve* been given through God’s Kingdom.

Prayer: *When I see need, O God, may I not try to hold onto what I have, but trust in Your abundant love to offer enough for all. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, August 5**

Read: Romans 1:8-15

Reflection:

Does our thankfulness become *action*? Is our gratitude mere sentiment or does it actually become an *embodied* response in our world? For Paul and the Christian community, their thankfulness to God and for one another led to *tangible acts* – their praise for Christ’s work became their commitment to the *body* of believers.

To “pray” for one another was never just in words of mouth or written upon a page, but a way of *being* in the world that *revealed* the love of Jesus. When we offer prayers as a congregation, we are committing to the Spirit of the LORD, recognizing God is already at work before we ever uttered a word, but we want to *join in* on what God *will* do. In our gratitude for grace, we follow that joy and thanksgiving into the cycle of blessing that is generated through the Holy Spirit.

Maybe all we can do in this season is offer prayers for our neighbors – but how about following that line of gratitude and checking in with those we pray for? Instead of just offering up our voices to the LORD, what if we use those same voices to ask of our sisters and brothers: “How are you? How may I help?”

Prayer: *God, there is a harvest waiting for us all – in our thanksgiving for what You give to us, may we show our gratitude by joining You in the work of reaping righteousness and love in Your world. Amen.*

## Thursday, August 6

Read: Acts 17:10-15

Reflection:

Not everyone is receptive to “good news.” Many times, it has nothing to do with “God,” but because the message of Jesus *disrupts* our comfort levels. The Kingdom of God is *above* all allegiances. That kind of sovereignty dislodges our ideas about economics, politics, even citizenship.

The Gospel doesn’t make us anarchists, but it does make us *disciples* – and disciples can only have *one* Master. Instead of worrying how others will react to God’s message in Jesus, maybe *we* need to listen anew to what God is asking of *us* in this Kingdom. There are no exceptions to love of *enemies* – there is little wiggle room for forgiveness. The fruits of the Spirit are not always as pleasing to the eye as the fruits of this world.

Yet following Jesus is not a solo adventure. When we get into trouble, remember that God welcomes us into a “family” of faith. When a disciple reaches out their hand, there should be another hand ready to take it in friendship, support, or love.

Prayer: *You sent us out two by two for a reason, O God – whether there is joy or hate at our message, it is never just “me” but always “us.” Amen.*

## Friday, August 7

Read: Psalm 85:8-13

Reflection:

The life of God is not acquired but rather *gifted*. God pours out God’s own life for the world to experience – yet it remains the task of faith to seek and embrace this gift. When we open ourselves to God’s life, we open ourselves to interconnectivity and mutuality – we see ourselves as part of the great web of God’s love reaching through *all* things.

If we’re wondering what it looks to embrace this gift, look no further than Jesus. See in his words and actions what total embrace and embodiment of God’s life can be – when the allowance of love and mercy are offered through each and every deed. There’s mystery in this path as well, but we need not fear the unknown – just remember “The LORD will give what is good” (v. 12).

I wonder what our communities would look like if we opened ourselves as Jesus did, instead of trying so hard to procure it through a transactional experience?

Prayer: *Put down our measuring scales and answer books and help us discover the intersection of Your grace and love, O God. Amen.*

## Saturday, August 8

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 9 – 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-389234> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: LORD, we have been waiting for normalcy and the resuming of our routines, yet it seems like we are still far from such comfort. Remind us to wait in You, and trust in Your abiding Presence.

**All: God of All, may our waiting not be absent of discipleship, but actively participating in Your Spirit’s redemption of our world. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Psalm 85:8-13; 1 Kings 19:9-18

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

- Describe a time when you were fearful, and you felt the LORD’s voice/presence sharing reassurance and comfort.
- Each “instance” of power may be described as a *theophany*, a revealing of God, but notice that it’s precisely in the “quiet” where God chooses to address Elijah. How might we be called to find the “quiet” spaces within our own lives?
- God’s call to Elijah does not remove him from the threat of danger, but sends him right back into its midst – God promises *presence* vs. insulation. How might the Church mirror such trust in presence vs. insulation from the world?

### 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.**



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

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### **“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.**

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

#### **Monday, August 17**

Read: Acts 15:1-21

Reflection:

This chapter reflects one of the great works of the Church: *conversation*. There was disagreement on exactly what place Gentile believers had within the *Jewish* family of Jesus. Did they need to be circumcised? What about the Law? How was faith in the Messiah supposed to progress through the rest of the world?

The narrative unfolds with Christians prayerfully deliberating, sharing experiences, and above all, being open to the voice of the LORD in their midst. It is the Spirit’s witness that leads the “Jerusalem Council” to include Gentiles into the community of disciples *without* circumcision – an incredible moment in the history of the Jesus movement. Without such conversation, none of us would be “here” – at least not as followers of Jesus.

How do we remain open to the Spirit’s witness in our own work today? How do we prayerfully converse and receive one another’s experience – especially when the result may be towards opening up the “walls” of our community to former “outsiders?” It’s difficult work, but it’s necessary for the growth of God’s Kingdom in us.

Prayer: *Keep us listening to each other, LORD, and above all, to You. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, August 18**

Read: 2 Kings 5:1-14

Reflection:

Naaman was used to extravagance – he expected that the God of Israel would only deal with the best of the best, and that his cure for leprosy would similarly require such excellence. Thus,

Naaman's stunned reaction when Elisha pointed him in the direction of the Jordan – a pitiful, muddied river in the wilderness of Judah. Sometimes, we get stumped by the simplicity of God's grace. We go looking for the extraordinary, but God shows up in the most ordinary of ways – we expect thunder and lightning, and God speaks instead through stillness.

Maybe we need a little more humility in our approach to God. Instead of trying to bolster ourselves up, trying to show God how important *we* are – perhaps we acknowledge the greatness of our God who *commits to us*: God *invites* us as children into God's heart. We don't need an entourage to get God's attention – “Wash, and be clean” (v. 13).

If we take a moment to open ourselves to the vastness of God's love, we would realize God is just waiting for *us* to dive in the waters of grace and be made new. God restores us to wholeness – but we may need to adjust our expectations of how that transformation takes place.

Prayer: *LORD, though You are high and mighty, You meet me in the lowest of lows. With all the gratitude I can muster, may I joyfully receive Your cleansing power and live renewed. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, August 19**

Read: Matthew 8:5-13

Reflection:

Roman centurions did not “appeal” to Jews. They were the commanders of the occupying forces of the Jewish homeland – they were powerful, dangerous, and cruel. Yet *this* centurion comes to Jesus, calls him “lord,” *and* trusts him to not only heal his servant but to do so with a mere word.

Stereotypes are incomplete – and when it comes to who is “worthy” of Jesus' love, they really don't hold up to Jesus' standards. “In no one in Israel have I found such faith” (v. 10). The “outsider,” the “oppressor,” shows the “true believers” and “insiders” what faith in the Messiah looks like. What may be even more incredible is that Jesus does not require anything more of the centurion than his initial appeal.

Can anyone truly be “outside” Jesus' grace? It seems like for Jesus, labels like “inside” and “outside” didn't really matter – he was just looking for people who needed help. Perhaps we could do no worse than starting there with our own discipleship.

Prayer: *LORD, maybe none of us are worthy of Your love, but by Your grace, we certainly realize anyone can appeal to You. Increase our faith, O Gracious One. Amen.*

## **Thursday, August 20**

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Reflection:

How we deal with conflict *matters*. How we argue and disagree *matters*. How we conduct ourselves, in private or public, *matters*. This discourse from Corinthians is simply part of a larger exhortation to “faithful living.” Not only were we made in God’s Image, but Christ sets His own seal of love upon us to *restore* that Image – we are “doubly” blessed to go forth in a new life.

That being said, we will “fail.” We won’t always get things right. We’ll hurt ourselves and others. We’ll tarnish God’s Image every day, sometimes without even trying. Before we get overwhelmed or feel entirely defeated, remember that sustaining our struggle is *hope*. “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

New life is always possible, because God’s love makes us new each day. We need not remain captive to our defeats – we can take hold of Christ’s victory and try and try again.

Prayer: *God of second, third, and countless chances – help me take hold of grace and live in the new creation of Your Son. Amen.*

## **Friday, August 21**

Read: Genesis 49:1-33

Reflection:

Jacob’s blessing for his sons is also a foretelling of Israel’s history – the ancient writers wrote “backwards,” weaving narrative into their own historical drama. That does not diminish the power or poetry of these words or the blessing that one generation may give to another. The act of forebears “passing on” wisdom and encouragement to future generations should not be dismissed so easily.

Those who come “after” us *need* the blessing of previous generations. We have to think “beyond” the timelines of our lives and consider who will inhabit our communities “after” us. Who will take our places of leadership when we retire, when we transition from care-givers to care-recipients, when we no longer can serve and must be served?

It’s important that we not only encourage and support future generations, but that we also know when it’s time for us to step aside and allow them the space to step forward and step “in.” It is not just “our” world, it is ours *and* theirs.

Prayer: *Holy God, keep me always mindful of those who will come after – whether it’s my own flesh and blood or simply extended members of my human family. May I help prepare them to inhabit this world, but also to carry the mantle of Your Kingdom Way so that they may pass it on to the next generation. Amen.*

## Saturday, August 22

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 23 – 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-331446> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: O God, fount of all wisdom, we praise You for the countless blessings You offer and the grace which liberates us from all bondage.

**All: Give us the light of Your Spirit, that, recognizing in Jesus, the Son of the Living God, we may be living stones for the building up of Your holy Church. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Psalm 138; Matthew 16:13-20

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

- Jesus makes a distinction between what the “crowds” say about him, and what his *disciples* say about him. What is the community of faith’s witness about Jesus in the face of the world’s perceptions?
- Jesus chooses to build his church on *people* – how might our lives function as foundations for God to raise up “structures” for the Kingdom?
- What comfort is there in trusting that not even “Hades” shall overcome Christ’s Church?

### 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.**



## **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 24**

Read: Psalm 8

Reflection:

During all this upheaval, have you taken a moment to observe the “heavens declaring the glory of God?” Have you paused in the beauty of creation that illustrates the poetry of our Creator? This psalm is just one of many instances in Scripture reminding us to stop, look and listen.

*See* this world that God has created and *share* in its marvels. Notice that while the earth is certainly beautiful and bountiful, God’s true marvel is “us.” Human beings are the jewel of God’s creation, because we alone are created *in* God’s Image.

This is not just a privilege, it is a responsibility. As God’s Image-bearers, we are God’s stewards on earth to care *for* what God has created. Let’s not just use and abuse – let’s do our part to live as guests in the worldwide “house of God” and *keep* this earth a marvel.

Prayer: *Creator God, may I not just marvel at Your wonders, but join in Your redeeming work to sustain them for all Your creatures. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, August 25**

Read: Deuteronomy 32:18-20, 28-39

Reflection:

God never leaves us without the means of redemption. When Israel was about to enter the land of promise, God had Moses prepare them a reminder of their covenant so that *when* they rebelled, they would have the means to “remember” and return to the LORD.

This “song” was Israel’s resource to maintain their redemption in their wanderings. It was a witness to be used *against* them should they stumble. That may not be a pleasant thought – to have to come face to face with our failures – but that’s how forgiveness works. Atonement requires us to acknowledge our wrongdoing in order to move “beyond” it.

Even when we forget the LORD our Rock, that Rock “remains” for us to return to and build up again our lives upon God’s foundation of love. Whatever our rebellion, God has a way forward – God has a way for us to “get back.” It may not be easy, and it may be uncomfortable – but grace is *costly* precisely because it is *all*-encompassing. Anything else is *not* our Rock – anything “less” is not our God.

Prayer: *You alone, LORD, can transform my wrong into right – You alone, O God, are the Rock that stands fast against our sin to enable us a solid place to stand. Help me hold onto the songs of remembrance that keep in touch with my redemption. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, August 26**

Read: Matthew 26:6-13

Reflection:

What’s the real problem for the disciples in this text? Are they angry about the “waste” of the woman’s resources on Jesus – or is it that it is the *woman* who performs the task Jesus praises? Perhaps the best answer we could say is “yes” – in either scenario, the issue lies with the disciples feeling slighted because ministry is happening *not* according to *their* standards.

This text is a cautionary tale for the Church when it comes to ministry taking place “outside” the boundaries of the Church’s “control.” What may seem “wasteful” to our standards might just be the poetic outpouring of those transformed by Jesus. It’s also very possible that those “outside” the Church’s labels might be the very ones whom Jesus declares are proclaiming “good news.”

The Church has to cease dampening the Good News by our mandates of “etiquette” and “tradition” and allow the Spirit to show us what Kingdom “celebration” looks like. For if we are those who are truly saved by Jesus, then we should be the *first* to pour the costly oil in memory of Jesus’ gifts and love. And if we’re not the first, then we shouldn’t get in the way of those who have gotten there ahead of us.

Prayer: *As we witness Your extravagant love, O LORD, may we offer up our resources and lives as extravagantly to that proclamation in humble adoration. Amen.*

## **Thursday, August 27**

Read: Exodus 2:23-24

Reflection:

God sees you. God hears you. Not just “you,” but all those who feel alone, or desperate, or under duress. Especially those who are crying out from oppression, God hears. And God *acts*. God is not only Creator, God is also Redeemer; and this text is one of many in biblical testimony that affirm God’s passion for liberation.

We may ask – “why are we so concerned with social justice?” As the Church, social justice *is* biblical justice. God is *concerned* about the poor and suffering. God takes “notice” of the sorrow of the earth. That’s certainly enough warrant for the Church to share in that concern.

If the Exodus wasn’t enough of a reason for our concern for social justice, then look at where God takes on “flesh” in our world – born in a stable, fled persecution at birth, spends the majority of life with working-class poor, and then focuses ministry on making the God of the Exodus come to life in the hearts of the people once again. God takes “notice” of suffering so much so that when the world placed God’s Son on a cross, God conquered death itself to answer.

*Prayer: Make us mindful of sorrow, O LORD, that we may respond as You have done throughout history. Bearing Your Image means bearing Your redemption – help us take “notice” and act. Amen.*

## **Friday, August 28**

Read: Matthew 8:14-17

Reflection:

Follow Jesus’ “touch” in Scripture, and you’ll notice that he observes no boundary. Cultural, religious, social – Jesus moves past whatever wall is set forth to divide if it gets in the way of His power. Jesus crosses lines to raise people from their brokenness so that we might in turn join him in his reconciling work.

Simon’s mother-in-law is one of many examples where Jesus reaches someone in their pain and brings them “back” to wholeness. This “new life” in Christ is never just for one’s own benefit, but becomes a gateway to service for others. Whether it is by way of the witness of the miracle itself, or the empowered new life that may serve as a grateful response – when Jesus touches someone, they are no longer their “own.”

Has Jesus touched you? What boundaries has he crossed to get there? How has a new “way” been made by His life *in* yours? If you’ve been brought from brokenness to wholeness, what will you do now with this gift?

*Prayer: No wall, no taboo, no sin can stop Your love from reaching me, O LORD. Pull me from the depths of myself to stand alongside You in Your new creation, and allow me to serve with a heart full of joy. Amen.*

## Saturday, August 29

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 30 – Outdoor Worship: 9:00 a.m. (note early time)

*Join us on the front-lawn for a service in God’s creation, or watch from home:*

<https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-319422> *Or, use this for your own at-home worship.*

### Call to Worship

Leader: Gracious God, You invite us into Your heart and life through Your Spirit and the work of Your Son. As we gather in Your creation, may we celebrate Your Presence in us.

**All: May we honor Your Kingdom by recognizing one another as sisters and rothers, gathered together at Your table to offer service and love to Your world. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Psalm 26; Romans 12:9-21

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

- How does “genuine” love take the form of active service for others?
- The power of Christ within us enables us to give of ourselves as Christ gave – what does that look like in your own life, particularly in this season?
- What are ways that goodness may “overcome” evil through our discipleship?

### 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.**