

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, October 12

Read: Exodus 32:15-35

Reflection:

Facing our brokenness is ugly, *painful* even. This scene depicted in Scripture is violent, chaotic, and maybe, even frightful. Yet it also reveals “hope,” strange as it might seem – because brokenness does not have to be the “end” of our story.

Removing the idols in our lives “frees” us from our own destruction – again, tearing down the false gods from our lives is not painless, but it offers true redemption. When our vision is cleared, we can see what was there all along – the God who created, redeemed, and *remains* with us, even in the face of our rebellion.

What “golden calves” exist in our lives? What idols exist even within our faith? How do we cease our allegiance to them and clear the way to truly grasp God’s love and salvation for us?

Prayer: *Forgive us when we bow down to things created rather than the One who created us. Forgive us, and then lead us into a new creation by Your love. Amen.*

Tuesday, October 13

Read: Philippians 3:13-4:1

Reflection:

It’s hard to move “forward” when so much of “what was” seems preferable to “what is.” Especially during a pandemic, we long for the days *without* the threat of an unknown virus and the normalcy of our routines and everyday practices. Yet here Scripture reminds us plainly that we cannot “go back.” The past is beyond us – all we have is how to “press on.”

Especially where our discipleship is concerned, all we have is what is “before us.” We give to Christ our pasts so that He may transform our present with the hope of His future. We must let go of the “former things,” and seek to embrace Christ’s *new* creation.

It’s hard to let go, particularly when we so long for the “old comforts” of the familiar past, versus the unknown discomfort of the future. Yet we cannot change “what was” – the only control we have is what to do with our present and how we will journey “forward.” All else is within the realm of God’s perfect and powerful love.

Prayer: *Jesus, I long for the golden past, but remind me that only Your love powerfully present in my life is the prize I should strive for. Amen.*

Wednesday, October 14

Read: 2 Kings 17:7-20

Reflection:

The scribes that sought to record Israel’s history wrote from a theological perspective. Always they attempted to view the world and national events in light of their relationship to God. It paints a different portrait from seeing things solely through socio-political lenses. It makes one realize that nothing is truly “separate” from our relationship with God.

We no longer record history the way ancient scribes did, but what if we attempted to do so on a small scale? What if we were writing the history (or story) of FCC? Where is our relationship (or lack thereof) with God leading us? Are we honoring God’s call for us to *be* God’s people in this place – is love our expression of law?

It is humbling to take stock of our misgivings as well as our successes. There cannot be growth without loss, no victory without change. Only by embracing the full picture can we continue learning from our past so as to better live into God’s call for us in the future.

Prayer: *Your anger may burn for a moment, but Your love lasts a lifetime. Help us write our story by Your grace and Your grace alone, O LORD. Amen.*

Thursday, October 15

Read: 3 John 9-12

Reflection:

The writer of this letter considers hospitality a mark of the “true” Church. Diotrephes is singled out as an individual who does not embody this practice of radical welcome. Placing others *before* self is the way of our Savior – hospitality (love of the stranger) is the *practice* of Jesus.

Welcoming others is part of our mission at FCC – we’ve written it into our very organization. Yet, like this letter reveals, it’s more than just words on a page. It is imitating (embodying) the good we have received from God – it’s bringing to life the love we profess as Christ’s.

What would someone write about *us* after an experience in our community? Would we be labeled “Diotrephes” or “Demetrius?”

Prayer: *May we imitate You, O Christ, the great Host who invites all into God’s heart and hall. Amen.*

Friday, October 16

Read: Matthew 14:1-12

Reflection:

The death of John the Baptist reveals two things for me. First, that the cost of speaking truth to power is high. Proclaiming what is just and true in the face of oppressive power is offensive and often “criminalized.” John was placed in prison and then eventually executed because those with power could not stand his critique of their abuses.

Second, that those with power are enslaved to it. Herod did not wish to “kill” John because he enjoyed listening to him – much like having a strange pet on call. However, because Herod was put on the spot by Herodias, he relented. Herodias, too, danced not for herself but for the sake of her mother, who truly wanted John’s head.

The Gospel is a critique against abuse of power because Jesus too confronted those enslaved by power and offered redemption through the sacrifice of his own life. When we relinquish our power *for* others – we are then “free” from its snare and are following in the Way of our Redeemer. The “Herods” of the world may slay the prophets, but they can never conquer the Risen King.

Prayer: *Love expressed in public is justice, because it proclaims that the only true Power is You, O LORD – and in Your Kingdom, no one may be ensnared by another. Amen.*

Saturday, October 17

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, October 18 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-218305> or in-person, following safety protocols. Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of unchangeable power, when You fashioned the world the stars sang together and the host of heaven rejoiced. Open our eyes to the wonders of creation, and teach us to use all things for Your good.

All: May we honor Your Name with the song of our lives, and bring hope to the world with our response of faith. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 96; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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

- What reason(s) do we praise God? What is the purpose of our praise?
- Does praise take the form of music only – or does praise also flow from our discipleship?
- How might our discipleship not only serve God, but also serve our neighbor – and in such service, elicit “praise?”

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.