

Compilation: September 7-September 27

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, September 7

Read: Exodus 12:14-28

Reflection:

The Passover was intended as a perpetual remembrance of what God had done for Israel. Every year, every generation, the people would remember God’s redemption *as if it was being done to them*. This kind of holy remembrance continues on not only in the Jewish tradition, but our own. When we gather for worship on Sunday, the “Lord’s Day,” we are remembering Christ’s resurrection from death and the creation of a new world.

Living memory is powerful. It keeps us connected to the past in such a way that our present is always full of opportunity for celebration and commemoration. To truly honor what God has done, we take such gifts and make them come “alive” in how we live *now*.

God knows we are a forgetful people – but that’s why we do the same things over and over again to build up our “muscle memory” so we can live out God’s redemption always. Never forgetting, always remembering – ever living for God’s Kingdom now and into the future.

Prayer: *Help us use what symbols we must to remember Your great love, and not only remember it, but make it our present and our future. Great is Your faithfulness. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 8

Read: Psalm 119:65-72

Reflection:

The psalmist finds comfort in God's instruction because such guidance leads into "goodness." None of us likely enjoy being told what or how to do something – it rubs up against our individualistic instincts. However, the psalmist praises that kind of shaping as worthy of God's loving care, going so far as to claim: "the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (v. 72).

How do we hold onto that sort of value in God's reformation of our lives? How do we keep God's love at the core of God's instruction? It may "humble" us to see how we stray from God's paths, but that kind of awareness can only further open us to God's grace.

Discipleship really is a journey of growth – always learning anew how great God's love is, and how our lives are ever called into that shaping and re-shaping process. It doesn't make the journey any easier, but it does remind us that God is a gracious teacher.

Prayer: *You are good and do good, O LORD – may I hold ever tightly to Your grace. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 9

Read: Matthew 21:18-22

Reflection:

I guess Jesus doesn't like fig trees. At first, there seems to be little reason for Jesus doing what he does to the fig tree – it certainly makes our Savior seem a little petulant to curse a plant for failing to produce. Where's the grace in this act?

The Gospels wove historical narrative into the larger drama of God's story, like much of the other biblical writers. Matthew is no exception here with Jesus and his "curse" on the fig tree. Israel was called to be a "vine" for the LORD – created to bear fruit for God's Kingdom. Yet often, there was little fruit to be found, and thus God's tumultuous relationship with them. In the same way, Jesus has come to Jerusalem and found little "fruit" for God's Kingdom present.

While we see this story as an exhortation to "believe" and thus have all the power of faith – perhaps what's at stake is our production of fruit for the Kingdom. Faith in God is that which leads to a life bearing Kingdom "fruits." Perhaps it's time our discipleship start producing that which Jesus so longingly searches for: *relationship with God.*

Prayer: *LORD, may we ask for in faith what You have called us to – life in Your Spirit, bearing fruit for Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Thursday, September 10

Read: 1 John 3:11-16

Reflection:

Love *does*. For all our Christian talk of “love,” it is meaningless unless it becomes realized in our daily discipleship. Love is an action, a verb. God’s love *saved* us – God’s love was no mere feeling or sentiment, but an eternal commitment to us which redeems us each and every day.

If we would bear the name of Christ, we cannot allow our love to be just the language we use – it must become our *activity*. If we wish to truly know what love “does” – then we look no further than Jesus. Not only in death, but in life, Jesus commits himself entirely to those around him. Jesus offers up his own life as a living testimony for God’s Kingdom. If we claim to have the “love” of Christ, then we can do nothing less than follow in His stead and commit ourselves to one another.

This self-sacrificial love, this giving of life for one another – it is not just our testimony of God’s life in our own; this is the power of resurrection at work in us: “we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another” (v. 14).

Prayer: *Unless we show it, LORD, we have not love. May Your love come alive in us, that we may witness to the world in our daily acts of forgiveness, grace, and charity. Amen.*

Friday, September 11

Read: Matthew 6:7-15

Reflection:

Why do we need to be “taught” to pray? Can we not just offer up to God our hearts? Certainly, we may answer “yes” – but the Lord’s Prayer not only teaches us how to pray, it teaches us how to *live*. The Lord’s Prayer shapes us as people of *God’s* Kingdom. Without this guidance, we would turn inward and pray only for ourselves and what *we* want – Jesus tells us to pray “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” (v. 10).

Jesus teaches us that our lives are to be grounded not in *our* desires, but in the singular will of God. After all, if we believe God knows us as our Creator and Redeemer, what have we to fear to pray for God’s will over our own? To allow the Lord’s Prayer to shape the way we pray and live is to align ourselves with the Way of Jesus – for this truly is the prayer *and* shape of His life.

Nothing about this prayer is easy to pray – we are opening ourselves up to Cross and Resurrection with these very words. Yet if we truly want to be disciples *of* Jesus, we will speak and *live* these words daily.

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. Amen.*

Saturday, September 12

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 13 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-405160> or in-person (with safety protocols), following the guided meditation.

Call to Worship

Leader: Almighty God, we praise You for our redemption that has made us a new creation of Your love and grace. Touch our hearts with grateful wonder at Your faithfulness.

All: Grant us delight in the mercy that has found us and bring the world to rejoice at Your feast of forgiveness. Amen.

Reflection: Exodus 14:19-31; Matthew 18:21-35

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

- How does gratitude for God’s redemption take shape in your life?
- Is forgiveness of others a way to offer gratitude for God’s forgiveness of us?
- What does gratitude look like during this pandemic? How can we as a community participate in gratefulness as a way to share God’s redemption with others?

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. 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, September 14

Read: Hebrews 11:23-29

Reflection:

The great “faith” chapter of Hebrews 11 is full of *action*. Faith is never separate from deed in this retelling of the story of God’s people. Moses, in this instance, is one who “by faith” joins in the movement of the Kingdom of God rather than remain in the comfort of Egyptian royalty. Faith is not just a matter of belief, it is a commitment to have God’s will transform our own.

The choice between comfort and sacrifice is difficult – none of us enjoy the unknown nor the trial of liberation, but “faith” carries us onward. When we *live* our belief in the love of God, when we *act* on God’s grace, we are making the “invisible” *visible*. Faith becomes *real* when our lives reflect our hearts.

There is a lot we do not “see” when we trust in God, but it is not so much what *we* see, but what the world sees *in* us. Christ called us His Body, God made us “building blocks” of the Kingdom. By *faith*, we reveal these identities to the world. By faith, we show our loyalty to God’s Kingdom over the kingdoms and comforts of “Egypt.”

Prayer: *God of Exodus, help us to follow Your vision of Promise, even through wilderness and sea, trusting in Your Presence to bring our discipleship to life. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 15

Read: Romans 14:13-5:2

Reflection:

How do we work to make sure others are not harmed by *our* discipleship? How do we practice *gracious* difference? The Church exists by unity *in* diversity – not by uniformity or conformity.

The only “conformity” that should be taking place is the power of the Spirit that conforms us deeper into the Presence and power of God. Our discipleship should not stifle or strangle the discipleship of others.

I don’t think of this biblical counsel as “to each their own” or “your truth is your truth; my truth is mine.” Rather, I think it is about how our relationships with Christ should only enable and empower our relationships with others. Our experiences may look different, but they should lead us all into the production of fruit for God’s Kingdom.

Judgment, dissent, and devaluing have no place in the work of the *body*. The Body of Christ, though containing many different parts, must work together in order to offer the “whole” up to God. Let those who “cook,” cook, and those who “eat,” eat, so long as both the one who cooks and the one who eats know that “they” cannot exist without the gifts and purpose of the “other.”

Prayer: *Make us one, O God, so we can together offer up the complete song of praise You have asked all Your creation to sing in joy. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 16

Read: 2 Kings 2:1-18

Reflection:

No one lives, or serves, forever. Eventually, transitions come. Elijah eventually gave way to Elisha. John the Baptist made way for Jesus. Yet the great promise of such narratives is that those who continue on bear the “mantle” of their forebears. Elisha continued Elijah’s ministry, empowered by God’s Spirit. We, who are Christ’s Body, continue the ministry of the Messiah through that *same* Spirit – the very Spirit of Jesus, in fact!

As empowered and equipped as we are through Christ’s Spirit, our ministry does have a season. No matter our gift or ability, there will come a time when we must “pass the mantle” to the next generation. The challenge will be in making sure that the next generation is ready to receive that Spirit openly and wisely, just as Elisha did, asking for a “double portion” (v. 9).

This story is not just how Elisha accepted the mantle, it’s also about how Elijah willingly relinquished it and was swept up into God’s future. There might not be chariots of fire to receive us at our transition, but God will certainly be present. From generation to generation, the Spirit of the LORD abides.

Prayer: *May we bear and share the mantle of ministry with patience, grace, and wisdom – all to the glory of Your Name. Amen.*

Thursday, September 17

Read: Exodus 15:22-27

Reflection:

Sometimes, the “bitter water” we have to drink is our own realization that following God is not a walk-through paradise. Discipleship does not remove from us the pain of life nor the difficulties of human existence. God rescues us from our sin and bondage – God delivers us from our own brokenness and spiritual pain, but God doesn’t make us invincible.

Life is hard, but God’s assurance is that God journeys *with* us. God is not ignorant of our pain – God *feels* it with us. The “water” of human life is often bitter and hard to swallow, but the living water of Jesus takes away our worldly thirst. The waters of the Spirit flow without end, and we need never worry if God can “handle” our thirst for righteousness.

None of this changes the reality of the world’s deserts, but may it be a blessed reminder that our God *is* the God of wilderness. God reigns over sea *and* storm, darkness *and* light – if we search for the waters of God’s Kingdom, we *will* find them. It just might take some walking to get there.

Prayer: *Holy God, as I wander, remind me that You wander with me. Amen.*

Friday, September 18

Read: Exodus 16:1-21

Reflection:

I suffer from “stomach love.” The way to my heart is definitely through my stomach. Food is often my love language, thus my strict routine of exercise to make up for this fact. Israel had “stomach love” too – but it was not just about their human necessities, it was about for “what was.” They *missed* Egypt – because even slavery was a “comfort” compared to the “unknown” of the wilderness.

We take great comfort in the things that appear to give us control. Food, drink, entertainment – these and more we hold close to our hearts because they make us very comfortable. God’s Kingdom involves these things, but more importantly, it makes us relinquish them to *God’s* control and not our own. And that can be scary – it can make us “hunger” for the “good old days,” even though our past bondage is still “bondage.”

Let’s take a note from the New Testament and allow the true “Bread from Heaven,” Jesus, to fulfill our desires and trust that His love is “enough.” God can fill our stomachs with what we truly need – and by doing so, make sure we are never enslaved again.

Prayer: *Feed me with the Bread of Heaven, LORD, that I may hunger only for Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Saturday, September 19

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 20 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-174840> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God and Creator of us all, Your love transforms us daily to be people of Your Kingdom. In Your light, we see and live as new creation; we encounter the gift of Your life in our own.

All: Give us wisdom from above, that in serving we fulfill our call, in loving we share Your redemption, and in fellowship we make hope come alive. Amen.

Reflection: Exodus 16:2-15; Matthew 20:1-16

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

- What is the “motivation” for our faith – is it the “reward” of God’s promises or the meaning/purpose of God’s call for us?
- What do you think God’s view of “fairness” is? Does it follow our understanding, or does/should our understanding flow from God’s view?
- Is our concern with what “others” receive compared to our own “earnings?” Why might that concern be misplaced in the eyes of God? How might that distort our true focus?

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, September 21

Read: Romans 16:1-16

Reflection:

People often skip over lists of names in the Bible – but doing so ignores the testimony of *actual* people in the Story of God. The fact that our sacred scripture includes such “honorable mentions” is a reminder that *every* story *matters* to God, and therefore, it should matter to *us*.

This list is also sacred because it shows how “inclusive” the Church actually is – *women* apostles, *Roman* Christians, people who may not have a story about in the Bible, but without *their* testimony, there would be *no* Bible. Without these names, there would be no ministry of Paul. Without these and other named and un-named heroes, there would be no discipleship.

Take note of the people who are part of your story. Give thanks, by name if you can, for all those who make *your* ministry possible. Glorify God for the tapestry of humanity that makes up the Church, that without each and every thread, there would be no story to tell.

Prayer: *For every name, for every life, for every story that builds up Your Kingdom, we give You thanks, O God. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 22

Read: Numbers 11:1-9

Reflection:

Does God overreact? The “fire of the LORD” (v. 1) may seem drastic in our eyes, but think of this less as history and more as story. God “burns” with anger because the people, who already *have* the gift of “manna” (sustenance), complain about wanting *more*. Essentially, they declare that God is not “enough.”

Do we offer a similar complaint today? Do we cry out that, though we profess God is good, we still have “want” of more money, more happiness, more comfort, more control, more “more-ness.” Our needs are important, but this was never a story about “need” – it’s a story of desire.

Our desire should be for the LORD – the ultimate “more-ness” is God, if only we would look past *our* own self. God offers us a whole *new creation*, if only we would relinquish the illusion of the old, broken one. It’s difficult, foregoing our interpretation of desire for the Kingdom of God – yet to do so allows us to grasp the “manna” from heaven *already* among us: *Jesus*.

Prayer: *Bread of Heaven, may I see in You the full offering of God’s Kingdom and the true fulfillment of all my need. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 23

Read: Matthew 18:1-5

Reflection:

Greatness according to Jesus is in our dependence, *not independence*, on the Kingdom of God. Children are dependent almost entirely on their parents, and remain humble due to their parents providing not only the majority of their sustenance, but also their worldview.

Jesus places a child as an example of “greatness” to the disciples perhaps to say: “Do you want to be “great,” then cease striving to do this all on your *own*. Cease striving to *be* the savior, and instead *follow* the Savior. Draw from the Kingdom of God like a child drawing milk from their mother’s breast.”

It’s difficult when we’re adults to relinquish our independence and “control.” It’s even more difficult to admit freely that we cannot achieve greatness on our own. Jesus reminded us that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3). Faith really is like growing up, because it requires us, no matter our age, to start “young” and be built up by the Spirit’s work in us, a *lifelong* process.

Prayer: *May I ever grow up more and more in You, O LORD, and in relying on You, be shown what true greatness looks like. Amen.*

Thursday, September 24

Read: James 4:11-16

Reflection:

Who gets to “judge?” If we start to point fingers, we’re already off-track. “There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy” (v. 12). We are not capable of

determining the faith of others, nor are we qualified to judge the “salvation” of our fellow human beings. That belongs *alone* to the LORD.

So, what is *our* role then? This portion of James invites us to lean into the LORD’s “will” – in other words, allow God’s view of life to shape your own. See the world as full of *neighbors*, not strangers. See possibility, instead of closed doors. See God’s hand in *all* things, that you may grasp that hand and *join* in God’s redeeming work.

When we see ourselves *less* as participants in a courtroom drama and instead view life through the relational communion of God’s “people,” perhaps we’ll free *ourselves* from “self-judgment” and grasp just how “spacious” grace may be when we leave judgment to our Creator.

Prayer: *Judgment is Yours, O LORD, and service and compassion are mine. By Your Spirit, shape Your will among us. Amen.*

Friday, September 25

Read: Acts 13:32-41

Reflection:

Connecting the Story of Israel to the Story of Jesus was key for the disciples. As Jews themselves, they were longing for the drama of their people to be fulfilled by God’s promises. When they understood Jesus’ life as the form that fulfillment took, it changed *everything* – all of their expectations transformed by new views of God’s work in and through Jesus.

It’s hard to change, especially when we feel disconnected from the story. Yet the power of the Holy Spirit is such that it takes the Story of Jesus and connects it to our own. The gift of the Gospel is in that it leaves *no one* out. All stories are found in *God’s* Story. Jesus may be the “way” to the Father, not in the sense of a way’s “narrowness” but rather its very *wideness* allows for *any* and *all* to travel this route.

Maybe Scripture is difficult to read and understand – that’s okay. What you should grasp is that Jesus is God *for* you. Jesus says “yes” to you, especially when the rest of the world appears to have said “no.” The challenge for us is not to “miss” seeing this grand connection – don’t become blind to your place in Jesus’ story. There’s room for us, so long as we make room for Jesus to change what we think we know and believe.

Prayer: *Continue to speak, O God, through Scripture, prayer, the Church, and the daily grace of growing and changing according to Jesus. Amen.*

Saturday, September 26

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 27 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-262921> or in-person, with safety protocols. Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: We give You thanks, O God, that by Your poverty we have become rich – by Your grace we are given life.

All: Keep us connected to that life through our discipleship, following the Way of Jesus in service to one another and to Your world. Amen.

Reflection: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalms 78:1-4, 12-16

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

- What are ways in which we pass the “story” of faith onto the next generation?
- How do we help raise new disciples to the Lord – not to take on our forms of discipleship, but to authentically create and engage their own?
- What in your life might be most difficult to “surrender” or allow God’s complete reign over it? How might “embodying” God’s Story require the transformation of your own?

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.