

COMPILATION: November 2 – November 29, 2020

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, November 2

Read: Psalm 5

Reflection:

In times of upheaval, we should be able to take “refuge” in God who *does not delight in evil*. Chaos, terror, pain are *not* of God – they are ripples created from *our own* addiction to inequality, power, and selfishness. Yet God will not allow the world to spiral off into oblivion. God does not watch passionless as we destroy our world and one another with impunity.

God will *love* this world into wholeness. God creates *and* redeems creation – God refuses to allow *our* brokenness to reign supreme. Perhaps it’s all too easy to see the “bad” around us, but then like the psalmist, we must return to our Source and be refreshed in God’s righteousness.

Only then can we see with new sight that God is present to our pain and instead of lament, we can “ever sing for joy” (v. 11).

Prayer: *Hear our prayers, O LORD, and respond to our cries – yet as we lean into You, reveal to us Your power and ever-redeeming love. One sign of goodness at a time. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 3

Read: Acts 13:1-12

Reflection:

Though all of us share in the singular call of the Gospel, to live as disciples of Jesus – that discipleship may take *different* forms in each of us. Being “set aside” for different tasks of ministry may be quite natural for the diversity of Christ’s Body as each of us have our own different gifts, passions, and abilities.

Not all of us can teach – not all of us can preach. Not all of us can build houses or balance books. Yet no matter what ministry we are “set aside” for – it’s *pivotal* to the overall mission of Jesus. Without these various parts, the Church cannot function as an effective whole. We need to be ever willing to lay our hands on one another and “send out” our diverse agents with joy.

Unless we acknowledge the uniqueness of everyone’s “gift,” we won’t be able to harness the needed skills to engage all areas of society. From the chambers of royal power to those on the streets of daily life, the Church must use the full extent of its giftedness for the proclamation and embodiment of Good News. Otherwise, it is *we* who might as well be “groping around in the dark” (v. 11).

Prayer: *Remind Your Church, O LORD, that all are called, all are gifted, and all are needed. May we see our diverse gifts, and use them, each and every one. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 4

Read: Joshua 10:12-14

Reflection:

We can believe that miracles do happen, but we also need to recognize that context *matters*, especially in Scripture. There are many stories, particularly within the violent, warfare narratives of Israel, that were crafted within a particular worldview. In this worldview, God was often *tribal* – God was *Israel’s* “god,” and did many things for *their* success – and often, God acted according to *Israel’s* views, and less than some “universal” principle.

We don’t have to believe that the “sun” *literally* stood still (which scientifically is improbable) so that Israel could defeat their enemies. We also don’t have to believe that God fought violent battles on behalf of one tribe of people against another. Yet we can believe that God is *faithful* in bringing redemption to people wandering and lost, looking for a place to “belong” – and God is willing to take as much time as necessary to make that transformation happen.

More than Israel or any one nation, this might apply to humanity in general – that God will bring us out of our wandering and desperation to wholeness and “new creation.” Free from brokenness, and wholly complete in love eternal.

Prayer: *You will restore us, O God, and You will take as long as is necessary. Amen.*

Thursday, November 5

Read: Amos 1:1-2:5

Reflection:

The language of the prophets, like Amos, is often harsh to the eyes and ears. It would be easy to see this as the “fire and brimstone” version of religion and walk away. Yet do you wonder *why* there is such anger on the part of God – do you wonder *why* both Jewish and later Christian communities maintained this as sacred “scripture?”

God’s anger was not for the breaking of mere “rules” of spiritual disobedience. God’s people, born of God’s freedom and righteousness, had forsaken their call to discipleship and become just like “everybody else.” Greed, social injustice, religious hypocrisy, and political machination – these were the “fruits” of God’s supposed “chosen” people.

For such betrayal of God’s redemption, for such rejection of God’s creative decree, there can only *be* “anger.” Yet always behind the prophet’s indignation and outrage stands the eternal and all-encompassing word of God’s forgiveness and transformative mercy.

Prayer: *Your justice is never retributive, God, but always restorative. Make us new, even if we must feel the sting of our wrongdoing first, before the healing touch of Your forgiveness. Amen.*

Friday, November 6

Read: Amos 3:1-12

Reflection:

Again, the prophets’ anger flows from their understanding of God’s love. God had “stooped” to rescue a lowly people; the Creator of all had emptied God’s self for mortals. And for such love, God was met with *indifference*. God’s love was set upon hearts of stone.

Forgiveness is transformation because it takes us from a state of indifference or apathy into *pathos* – caring, feeling, “knowing.” When we embrace the embracing love of God, we also embrace our own faults and former injustices. We embrace the vast inequality of our relationship with God, and yet the amazing scales of grace that are always sliding in God’s direction to our benefit.

Can we allow the enormity of God’s love to change us? This is why the prophets spoke. They believed change was possible *because* God has called them to speak. Possibility was always the hope that filled the prophets’ voices, even as they declared the injustice of people’s irresponsibility and indifference.

Prayer: *May we continue to seek to know You as You have known us, O God. May we hear Your Spirit’s voice making possible change of hearts, minds, and situations. Only Your love is eternal, and thus our finitude can become a blessing. Amen.*

Saturday, November 7

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, November 8 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-818356> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: LORD God, we come to commit ourselves anew to Your Kingdom. We bring our fullness before You, offering ourselves to Your grace and love, to prepare us for true discipleship.

All: You alone are our God; You alone are our hope. As we claim You today and always, remind us that You have claimed us forever in Christ. Amen.

Reflection: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Matthew 25:1-13

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

- The scene from Joshua presents the “choice” of who shall the people serve. This “choice” might be one we face every day in our discipleship – by our actions, what “god” will we serve – the world, of God?
- The parable from Matthew is one that may seem unfair, but if the context is preparation, what might we consider for our own preparations in “tending” the light of God in us and in the world?
- Serving God is a continual turning away from the idols of the world – discipleship and repentance are two sides of the same coin. What idols need to be turned away from in your own life?

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, November 9

Read: Joshua 24:25-28

Reflection:

This is not the first time that “stones” have been witnesses against humanity’s actions, nor will it be the last. It was the ground that “cried out” to God with Abel’s blood (Genesis 4:10). Jesus claims that the “rocks” will “shout” if praise is kept from the people’s lips (Luke 19:40).

The world is watching us, *literally*. People see what we do and it reflects upon what we claim to believe. The *earth* also sees what we do, and that action, too, *testifies* to our relationship to the LORD. God has eyes everywhere, so it’s to our benefit *not* to be hypocritical with our actions and words. It’s to the benefit of our faith that we uphold what we promise with consistent deeds.

Does this mean we cannot stumble? Certainly not, but it does mean owning up to those mistakes rather than hiding away. It does mean that we need to honor the stones that watch us as much as our neighbors – we are *all* connected, and what we do to one person or in one place has consequences for everywhere else.

Prayer: *Keep me faithful to my promises, O LORD, as You are faithful in Your love, from stone to stone, person to person. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 10

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Reflection:

Do we pray in such a way for God to “direct our way to you” (v. 11)? Do our actions follow such prayers that we would strive for one another’s benefit, for the flourishing of others’ *over* ourselves? This is not something originating with the apostles, but rather, what they had learned

from their Messiah Jesus. This was their understanding of the Kingdom of God revealed in Jesus, and they challenged those who shared their faith to do the same.

Can we reclaim such love of neighbor? Can we re-center Christianity on *others* versus the “self?” Instead of praying solely for what *we* need or desire, why do we not raise up the concerns of our friends, family, neighbors, and strangers? I know many of us do concern ourselves with others – but it often *follows* our own needs rather than *leads* them.

Again, this is not some “new” form of discipleship, but the model learned from Jesus. This is God’s Way *embodied* in the Christ. How might we follow Christ anew that our prayers and deeds lead *through* our neighbors instead of including them as afterthoughts?

Prayer: *Strengthen our hearts in holiness, that we may abound with love for our family of faith. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 11

Read: Matthew 24:29-35

Reflection:

It’s easy to try and read Scripture as a “blueprint” for the future. The difficult part is allowing Scripture to read *us*, and transform our understandings for decisive action in the *present*. The language of “signs” in Scripture is often taken as warrant for sometimes blatantly *un-Christian* behavior, or endorsement of situations and/or contexts that are *not* Christlike, because “the world is ending.”

Yet what if instead of the “end” – Jesus is speaking of the “beginning?” What if Jesus told the disciples to “watch” and “be ready” so that they would know that Jesus’ death and resurrection created a *brand, new world*. The Kingdom of God *is* at hand, meaning it is within our grasp. God’s future is breaking into our present through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The lesson from the fig tree was that it did not bear fruit in its proper season. The “season” of the Church is now, for us to bring forth Kingdom fruit from our lives. The old world of our sin has “ended” – the “new creation” of Christ’s Body has begun.

Prayer: *I need not wait around for the End of Days. You alone, O LORD, are the End and the Beginning. May my life be found productive and alive with You always. Amen.*

Thursday, November 12

Read: Judges 2:11-15

Reflection:

There's a big difference between the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges. Namely, it's a matter of perspective. Joshua maintains a largely "positive" view of Israel while Judges is, shall we say, decisively more *negative*. It all stems from "where" the people's relationship with the LORD falls in terms of their priority.

Both are narratives of violence, but perhaps a better reading than historical drama is a question of faithfulness. In Joshua, the people follow the LORD – in Judges, they follow *themselves*. They act as those "without" a true king or leader. In other words, they choose independence over discipleship – yet by raising themselves up over against God, they become "slaves" to themselves (and everyone else).

Freedom comes not by our own victory, but by realizing our dependence on God *actually brings life and liberation*. We are blessed by God's gifts, freely given and freely received. There is no "conquest" in the Christian life. Only a faithful surrender to belonging to God's grace.

Prayer: *Remind me that the life You call me to is not one of the tyranny of self, but the delightful dependence on Your grace, and following You into ever more life. Amen.*

Friday, November 13

Read: Judges 2:16-23

Reflection:

The Book of Judges, while violent, offers a realistic picture of the journey of life and faith. It is more of a back-and-forth struggle to remember and reciprocate God's Image in us than it is a straightaway path to victory. God, however, does not leave us alone in such struggle. God gives us "judges" – "deliverers."

Maybe they're not the warriors or prophets of old – but the "judges" in my life were no less powerful and necessary. Sunday School teachers, ministry mentors, colleagues, volunteer coordinators, extended family members – God has used many such "deliverers" in my life to get me back "on course" to the path of God's Kingdom.

Perhaps we can be a "judge" for someone else – not in terms of dispensing a verdict, but in helping bring about a restoration to the way of God's Kingdom. Perhaps we can help "course correct" in *sharing* the struggle. That kind of shared commitment might be "violent" in terms of the risk involved to our own comfort and security. Yet it's a sign of God's devotion that we are not without resources in the quest to order our lives according to the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: *Help me see all the deliverers You send my way, O LORD, and may I greet them with open arms. Above all, may I greet Jesus, as the One Judge who truly came to save. Amen.*

Saturday, November 14

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, November 15 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-770520> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Giver of all gifts, we praise You for Your lavish blessing over us. May we seek to return those gifts with lives of service and love for Your creation and Your Kingdom.

All: Keep us invested in the production of fruit by Your Spirit, discipleship that directs the world to Your glory and goodness. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 123; Matthew 25:14-30

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

- Each servant is given a different amount of talents, yet is the impetus on the advancement of those talents, not the quantity produced or their varying amounts, so long as genuine production happened?
- Are the talents ever the property of the servants, or are they “on loan” from the Master?
- Is a talent “hidden” considered “wasted” i.e. unused?

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, November 16

Read: Psalm 83

Reflection:

Haven't you ever wanted to scream and shout at God to just do *something*? You're not alone. Many psalms and voices like this one exemplify well the human longing for God to *act*. It's noteworthy that usually the desire for that action is vindication of the speaker *over and against* their enemies. Certainly, there is room for God's intervention in our lives, on behalf of our needs and desires, and yet there's also caution against us thinking to “own” God.

The whole earth belongs to the LORD – and there are many voices that God listens to. Yet while certainly being tied down to any of them, God has committed to *all* in steadfast love. This love for us does not mean *our* every desire satisfied. Rather, it means that we will never be “outside” God's concern.

God's good *for* us, may not look like our Christmas wish list, but because it's *God's* good, we can and should trust that it will be for our flourishing in the end. So next time you want to shout out to God, go ahead – just remember, you're not the only one shouting, and your needs aren't the only ones God is holding in God's heart.

Prayer: *Your world is so much bigger than me, O LORD, and yet You do hold it all so precious and powerfully in the palm of Your hand. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 17

Read: Romans 2:1-11

Reflection:

People often turn to the words of Roman 1 when passing judgment on others, but such practice ignores the warnings of Romans 2. Judgment is God's realm *alone*. We may be called to hold one another accountable to standards of discipleship (which shares a root with "discipline"), but none of us are fit to judge another.

When we judge others, whatever measure we use must be cast right back upon us – whatever standard we are holding others to can only be the same standard we hold ourselves. However we look at it, *all of us* fall short.

The Apostle Paul reminds us here that any conversation on God's judgment should include, above all, a conversation on *grace*. Instead of weighing each other's salvation, perhaps our energy is better spent receiving the sheer *enormity* of God's love? "Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you into repentance" (v. 4)? Don't get lost looking at the sins of others, and end up missing your own sin and God's overwhelming forgiveness of it all.

Prayer: *As I leave salvation to You, O LORD, may I find kindness for others and for myself, freeing me to participate in that salvation project, rather than hold it up. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 18

Read: Psalm 9:1-14

Reflection:

Many of the psalms attribute images of refuge and safety within God's presence and power. Often, they utilized the language of combat and defense, because the context they wrote from was the experience of tribal warfare.

We don't need military experience to translate the assurance of God's commitment to us. No matter the "battlefield" – God offers us refuge in God's own heart. Within the realm of such assurance, is that God's power is "beyond" the rise and fall of nations. God's rule is not entrenched in the political victories of this world.

God's power comes from being the Creator and Redeemer of all. What God has brought into being, God has committed to bringing about its restoration and final redemption. Again, what greater stronghold could we ask for in such turbulent times that: "[God] judges the world with righteousness; he judges the people with equity" (v. 8).

Prayer: *Remind us that You alone are Sovereign, God, and Your redemption wins out in the end. Amen.*

Thursday, November 19

Read: Genesis 48:15-22

Reflection:

Many narratives like this in Scripture subvert the “normal” trajectory of family tales. Rather than the “elder” being the primary recipient of blessing, it is the “younger” who somehow comes ahead. “The first shall be last,” Jesus would later say. Perhaps these stories are helpful reminders that our “destinies” do not follow the “normal” order of things.

God’s Kingdom is *upside-down* – it subverts the preference of strong for weak, rich for poor, elder for younger. It does not abide by an economy of greater rule, but rather, greater *serve*. Greatness, and blessing, flow not from our own inclinations, but from our capacity to follow and live as disciples.

“In giving, we receive” St. Francis of Assisi would even later say, captivated by the example of Jesus’ life and legacy. How we embody that kind of humility will only empower us for lives of discipleship and “true greatness” as defined by our Lord, and enable us to identify as the “family of God” rather than any biological labels.

Prayer: *May the God whom my ancestors in faith walked also shepherd me all the days of my life. Amen.*

Friday, November 20

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

Reflection:

This chapter marks an important shift in the Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39 are known as “First Isaiah” – the prophetic voice that spoke *before* Israel’s exile to Babylon. Chapter 40 begins the new period where a new voice in the “school” of Isaiah offers hope *for restoration*.

This new voice speaks from the disruption of exile and reminds Israel of God’s compassion. Whereas it seemed as if God’s judgment would be their destruction, this voice declares that God’s judgment is another faucet of God’s love – God’s response to Israel’s unfaithfulness may sting initially, but ultimately *God’s* faithfulness will soothe such wounds.

“Second” Isaiah is an important word for all Christians in that the last word of God is never one of destruction, but *restoration and rebirth*. This is a word of *resurrection* – death may claim a day, but Easter is *eternal*. God is the true Lord of history, and humanity’s hope is bound to this God who proclaims “comfort” even in the midst of despair.

Prayer: *Shepherd me from darkness into Your light, O LORD, and lead me out of my exile into Your Kingdom path. Amen.*

Saturday, November 21

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, November 22 – Worship: 10:30 a.m. “Christ the King Sunday”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-548479> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of power and love, You raised Jesus from death to life, the Risen King to rule over all creation. Free the world to rejoice in His peace, glory in His justice, and live in His love.

All: Unite us in Jesus, our Savior and Lord, and send us in Your Spirit to serve our community with His benevolent reign. Amen.

Reflection: Matthew 25:31-46; Ephesians 1:15-23

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

- How does the “king” in Matthew’s parable make service to the “least” the standard of service *to* the king himself?
- The Letter to the Ephesians begins with a prayer for Christ’s greatness, relating him as the “head” of the church, which is us, his “body” – what about the image makes our discipleship a continual relating to Jesus?
- How does Jesus connect love of God to love for one’s neighbor? What does that mean for our own 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.

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“Ordinary Time” (Growing Season)

Monday, November 23

Read: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Reflection:

Jesus *is* the Gospel. His life, death, and *resurrection* – his words and actions, *all of it*, are the “good news.” Precisely because God’s Word to us *is* this Living Christ – they cannot be “chained” (v. 9). They cannot be hidden away or locked behind iron bars. Jesus *is free*.

Free from our distortions or selfish desires. Free from political rallying cries or nationalistic endeavors. Jesus is free *from* us, to be free *for* us. Jesus *is* “good news” because God redeemed, and committed to redeeming, what God has made.

Even when we are “faithless, [God] remains faithful” (v. 13). In the midst of all the screw-ups and distortions we tend to bring to the table, God still makes a way out of our mess, bringing us along for the ride. God uses God’s freedom for our flourishing and fulfilment.

Prayer: *Wonderful LORD, thank You for being free from my mess, to be free to save me from myself and help me add to the clean-up project of all the world. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 24

Read: Revelations 19:1-9

Reflection:

The “praise” scenes in Revelation are no mere preview of the future – they’re a representation of the heavenly reality *now*. The writer’s vision is a glimpse behind the earthly “veil” to what happens in the space of God in *our present*. There is a glorious chorus going on in the heavenly realms, even during trial upon the earth. For the space of God recognizes the full *glory* of God – there are *no* doubts about God’s power and presence in such space.

The “future” that Revelation hints at is when the space of God and *our* space *meet*. This picture will be not only the reality “beyond” the veil, but throughout the entire *cosmos*. There will no longer be “two” spaces – but *one: God with us*, fully and finally.

The angelic choir and song of saints might seem like a boring future, but what the writer was truly trying to capture was *unlimited joy*. Imagine life *without* struggle, pain, hardship – that is the presence of God *undiluted*. That, to me, seems plenty of reason to sing.

Prayer: *Hallelujah! For God is LORD now and always – and one day, there will be no more separation between heaven and earth. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 25

Read: Ezekiel 33:7-20

Reflection:

Amid the strange prophetic imagery of Ezekiel comes the emphasis on accountability and transformation. These words stung the ears of the newly-exiled Judeans in Babylon, reminding them that their relationship with God did not excuse them for neglecting faithful action in the world. God was looking for reconciliation, but it wouldn’t come without conscious effort on the part of the people.

Forming our lives according to the Kingdom of God may feel like some sort of infringement upon our supposed freedoms, but Ezekiel offers the perspective that this is a conversation about “life and death.” To truly *live*, we must allow God to define a just engagement with the world around us. To truly be redeemed, we must not hide nor ignore our failings.

Ezekiel proclaimed “life” to those who believed themselves “dead” in the LORD and were lost to the chaos of Babylon. Yet our God is one of Resurrection – the grave is no bar to God’s power. God can always bring new life from our dust – we just have to be willing to live as God shows us.

Prayer: *Keep my ears and heart open to Your voice, and always guide me to Your restoration. Amen.*

Thursday, November 26

Read: Zechariah 13

Reflection:

The prophets envisioned God’s works often as “fire” – not in a damnation-sort of way, but as a “cleansing” agent. Israel had so distorted its relationship with God and its mission as God’s special people, that they needed to be *refined*.

We may balk at any need to “change” – often approaching life from the view that it is *others* that need changing, *not* us. Yet the prophet’s word to Israel (and us) is that God *will* change us so we can fully *be* God’s people. It might be difficult, maybe even painful – change is *never* easy, but that’s kind of the idea of a faith centered around *death and resurrection*.

“I will...refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them” (v. 9).

Prayer: *Shape us, O LORD, that we might live renewed and refined as Your Body, Your Church on earth. Amen.*

Friday, November 27

Read: Zechariah 14:1-9

Reflection:

The prophet’s climatic vision was the LORD “becoming king” over the earth. God was already the rightful ruler over all, as life’s Creator, but God had yet to right the wrongs of the earth. The “Day of the LORD” that the prophets like Zechariah envisioned was this final act of restoration on behalf of the world’s true King.

The disciples found these images helpful in understanding what had happened when Jesus came on the scene. They realized Zechariah’s vision had begun in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus rising from the grave was the first sign of God’s “enthronement” over the world. In Jesus, God has signaled that God’s final reign was underway.

Jesus has yet to take that final step in righting all wrongs, but the Resurrection reminds us that God is *present* to our pain. God will not allow death to reign unchecked – God answers the “cross” of the world’s evil with God’s vindication of Jesus. We share in Jesus’ reign by helping live under his rule even amid the reality of sin and death. For neither our brokenness nor the world’s pain has the last word, but our true King, Jesus, holds the final say in his hands *alone*.

Prayer: *May we make way in our lives and the world for the rule of Jesus, by living daily under His power and presence. Amen.*

Saturday, November 28

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, November 29 – 1st Sunday of Advent – Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-250362> . Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Faithful God, Your promises stand unshaken through all generations. Renew us in hope, that we may be awake and alert, living faithfully in the reign of the present and coming King.

All: Keep us engaged in the work of our Lord, that we may share in the light of Christ, burning brightly against all the dark of the world. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 80:1-17, 17-19; Isaiah 64:1-9

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

- How does Advent invite us to “long” for God’s Presence in our lives?
- What do both the psalmist and Isaiah desire God to do – how does the Church long for that same activity in Jesus?
- How can we turn our expectation and waiting into an active posture of engagement in God’s already-not-yet Kingdom among us?

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.