

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 have entered the Season After Epiphany (Ordinary Time: Growing Season), learning from Jesus’ life and teachings. May we journey together into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us.

Ordinary Time (Growing Season)

Monday, January 11

Read: Genesis 17:1-13

Reflection:

God’s promises have tangible signs in the world. God could have made this covenant with Abram and the mere voicing of the promise would have been enough. Yet God wants *visibility* – the Invisible One deals in the stuff of matter and “real.”

Nothing was more precious in the ancient world than one’s posterity. God points to this instrument of procreation and says: “This will be the sign.” It was not an exclusion of females or a privileging of males – it was the condescension of a different time and culture, and God chose to work *within* that sphere to make visible the mystery of the “hidden” God.

Circumcision would become more than a mere physical sign in the biblical narrative – it would become a metaphor for one’s relationship with the Divine. Flesh and blood require continuous reformation and renewal in order to remain faithful to God’s promise. Yet the beauty of our God is God’s continued willingness to deal with us frail and fickle human beings. The signs of God’s promise and love show up in our very real and ordinary lives, and that’s Good News.

Prayer: *Thank You for showing me that Your love takes shape in and through my life, most especially in that promised King, Jesus. May Your Son be the ultimate sign of Your promise. Amen.*

Tuesday, January 12

Read: Psalm 69:1-5, 30-36

Reflection:

I’m sure many of us can equate the feelings of this pandemic to drowning: being overwhelmed and desperate, scrambling for breath. Yet this psalmist, in the midst of their woe, keep their sight on the Almighty, remembering that though the waters rise, God’s faithfulness remains.

We belong to the God of storm *and* stillness: The Creator and Redeemer of *all* things. Though all of life may be upended, God's love does *not* change. *We are* God's beloved, no matter the economy, government, or our own wellbeing.

Because of this identity, we can cry out with confidence: "For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds" (v. 33). Maybe we believe God does not hear or see – maybe we feel alone in our pain. Yet we need look no further than the Risen One – for though Christ cried out in agony on the Cross, dying in the face of the seeming void; in the Resurrection, God *answered* Jesus and all the world. What God has made, God *redeems*.

Prayer: *Restore us, O God, for this season has seemed far more than I can bear. Yet with You, I know there is always salvation, always a rescue. May I trust in that, and live in thanksgiving. Amen.*

Wednesday, January 13

Read: John 1:29-34

Reflection:

John the Baptist knew Jesus, because he was ready to *get out of the way*. John knew that his ministry was not *the* ministry. He was always ready to *point to* Jesus, rather than stay in the spotlight *for* Jesus. Perhaps that's an important lesson for the Church.

We're not called to be the "celebrities" of salvation or social justice. Our ministry is not meant to be a shiny or popular fascination from the public's perception. Yet it *makes way* for Jesus. The Church, like John, knows that *Jesus* is the Lamb of God – *He* is the world's hope, and we're simply the ones *signaling* to His redemption.

Humans have become very good at *not* getting out of the way – as we deal with social media and heightened individualism. Yet, faith calls us into the practice of humility, of knowing that *God* is the Source, and *we* are the products. We are *not* redeemers, but the *redeemed*, simply pointing back to the One who gave us hope and purpose in the first place.

Prayer: *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, help me make way for Your Presence. Help me proclaim Your power, and use what You've given me for dependence, and not self-sufficiency. Amen.*

Thursday, January 14

Read: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Reflection:

To be known so thoroughly is a frightening concept. To have every fiber of our being be scrutinized by the Divine eye is not often discussed or reflected on any longer. We have grown

accustom to a “laissez faire” attitude that we’re happy to talk about God’s love, but not about God’s expansive *knowing*.

It shows in our culture that we’re obsessed with “picture perfect” – and yet *nowhere* does this text mention imperfections as *negative*. It simply states God knows every piece of us – God knows us to the depths of our soul because God created us. *That* is love, because only One who has borne us entirely and maintained faithfulness to that creation without fail can speak of our entirety as *beloved*.

Don’t fear the loving gaze of our Creator. There’s beauty to being known so intimately, in the way that only God can know us as God’s children. *All* that we are is *open* to God’s sight.

Prayer: *If I can open myself to Your all-knowing vision, perhaps I can be true to that sight, as well as the same sight for my neighbors. Knowing that we are loved, scars and all, perhaps we can better embrace grace for ourselves and one another. Amen.*

Friday, January 15

Read: Acts 13:16-25

Reflection:

The Apostle Paul wanted to connect Jesus to the story of his own people, a community that was trying to write off Jesus as an “accident” or a failure. Yet Paul tied Jesus into the promises of God, interpreting Israel’s history as *Jesus’* history.

It’s a reminder for all of us that with God there are *no* accidents or failures. God’s promises do not end in spontaneity or error – they use and partner with human life to bring about redemption. God, as the faithful Author over our stories, ties *all things* together in the new creation of God’s love. Jesus is what that great webbing together of human and Divine looks like, and an invitation for all of us to tie our own stories into *His*.

Both Paul and John the Baptist saw Jesus’ story as fulfilling their own. The task remains for us to do the same. The challenge is doing more than connecting the dots – it’s actually responding to Jesus’ call to form our own lives after His. We must continually allow Jesus’ ministry to shape and reshape our own.

Prayer: *Gracious God, there are times when it feels like my story is so far from what You write or have written. It feels like there’s no hope for my own redemption. When this struggle occurs, remind me of Jesus. Tie Jesus’ life and love into my story and help me see how Jesus came for me, to welcome my life into the very life of God. Amen.*

Saturday, January 16

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, January 17 Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-968283> . Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Gracious God, Your mercy is an unexpected miracle. Help us to embrace such wonder and the beauty of Your love within our daily discipleship.

All: Through holy gratitude at Your marvelous knowledge of us, may we boldly declare in our lives Your glory and generous power. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 139:1-18; John 1:43-51

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

- What does God’s expansive knowledge of you mean for your discipleship?
- How does it add to the layer of Jesus’ intimacy with us that God’s all-encompassing vision dwells within him?
- Does such intimate knowledge draw us closer, or provide some element of fear in terms of our relationship to the Divine?

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.