

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 18

Read: 1 Samuel 9:27-10:8

Reflection:

God works with a lot of different people in Scripture. Some are like Saul – a promising start by all appearances, but it turns out his leadership isn’t exactly going to cut it. And yet, here he is – still a part of Israel’s story, and thus, part of *our* story.

No one is perfect – yet all of us still have roles to play in God’s plans for redemption. It’s important to remember whenever we start doubting our ability, that we are anointed not as “kings,” but as Christ’s *own people*. We are marked in the Spirit of Jesus, and by His Name, we are called to *various* ministries.

We are anointed *in* our imperfections – and no matter our storylines, God can use the threads of our lives for good. We just have to continue to be willing to allow God’s voice to speak over our own. That requires humility and grace, but again, such gifts flow from our anointing *in Christ*, instead of any nation or worldly king.

Prayer: *You take me as I am, and call me into Your service. When I doubt, when I struggle, remind me of the scent of the oils of Your Spirit, and return me to Your Kingdom ways. Amen.*

Tuesday, January 19

Read: Acts 5:1-11

Reflection:

Sometimes, it’s only by shocking our senses that we pay attention. I tend to think that narratives like this one function precisely in that manner: *pay attention*. The “truthfulness” of this account, I believe, is not in its historical recounting, but in that *greed kills*.

Ananias and Sapphira are examples of what happens when our resources *own us*, rather than the other way around. It’s a story of what happens when we refuse to surrender our gifts to the

Kingdom of God. It's *not* that God will strike us dead on the spot, but that such greed may be the death of us, at least spiritually, in the end.

Maybe this text is a word of caution to the Church in an age of consumerism and consumption. What kind of investments are we making – do our buildings, resources, and ministries own us, or do we own them as tools *for* God's Kingdom? God alone knows.

Prayer: *Keep me free from greed, O LORD, and instead, grateful for Your gifts, and freely sharing what You have given me for all to share. Amen.*

Wednesday, January 20

Read: Luke 18:15-17

Reflection:

What is it about our discomfort with children in worship? Oh sure, we enjoy the Children's Moment or Christmas program – when they're all up front and behaving nicely (or acting a bit silly) for our entertainment. But what about when they're agitated and vocal about it – what about when they're just being kids in a space too focused on adults?

Jesus had *none* of our discomfort with children. He upheld children as examples of what it looked like to receive God's Kingdom. Being a child means dependence, it means simplicity, it means wonder and joy – these are things too easily pushed aside for us older folk. Maybe Jesus is inviting us to depend again on our Divine Parent – maybe Jesus is welcoming us to “play” with the Holy Spirit. Maybe Jesus just wants us to feel loved and accepted no matter what.

There's a lot we can teach our young ones, but there's also a lot *we* can *learn*. Especially if we want to understand how to embrace God's Kingdom, it might be time for children to *stay* in worship, and the adults off to learn what all “this” means.

Prayer: *May we walk boldly to Your open arms, O LORD, like the children of God we've all been made to be. Amen.*

Thursday, January 21

Read: 2 Peter 3:1-7

Reflection:

Why does Scripture about “the end” or judgment scare us off? The early Christians didn't use texts like this for scare tactics or making people believe based on fear. The return of Jesus and the finality of God's Kingdom was an event *longed for* – being reminded of the world's destination was a way to *sustain* faith, not break it.

We hold onto God's future because we train ourselves that the world's salvation does *not* rest *solely* on our shoulders. Redemption is not a humanity-alone project. God's future is *God's* future; God will fulfill what God has promised. We may participate, we may build *for* that fateful Day, but the final burden is *not* on us.

We also hold onto the Kingdom coming because it reminds us we're *all* "unfinished" products. It's okay not to "get it" now. It's okay to still learn, and grow, and try. There will always be something that only God can complete in us and in the world. So, we live in hope, that God's future will transform all we have tried to reconcile and redeem on our own. We trust that one day God will make *all things* new. Until then, we *keep* trying. We "wait," but never in vain.

Prayer: *Holy One, the End is Yours. May we live faithfully now, trusting in Your future to finish what we carry on. Amen.*

Friday, January 22

Read: Luke 10:13-16

Reflection:

How can the Church expect anyone to really listen, if *we* ourselves remain unhearing? How can we preach repentance when the *Church* refuses to admit it has problems? Jesus spent the bulk of his ministry critiquing not those *outside* the religious community, but the very *establishment* of it. Jesus railed against the Pharisees because *they* should have known better, and yet their hardened hearts had made them miss the mark.

This pandemic has revealed a lot of holes to our society: Who is "essential?" What is the value of life versus "rights?" What really is the separation between church and state? Maybe the pandemic has presented an opportunity for the Church to listen *anew* to Jesus. Maybe it's time again for the Church to be critiqued for missing the mark.

The Church is a communion of saints and sinners – we are both broken *and* beautiful. We cannot preach salvation for *others* – redemption includes *all of us*. The Church does not stand sinless apart from the world – it is a sanctuary for the sick right in the *middle* of it all. It's time to let Jesus bring us to our knees in humility and transformation, for the good of *ourselves* and the message of God's Kingdom.

Prayer: *Break our hearts of stone, O God; unstop our ears and help us to see. It's too easy for us to look at the specks in our neighbors' eyes, while missing the logs in our own. Call us to repentance, and help us to listen. By the power of Jesus, we pray, O LORD. Amen.*

Saturday, January 23

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 24 Virtual Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-146457> Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Loving God, through Your Son, You call us to repent, believe in the good news, and celebrate the coming Kingdom. Like Christ’s first apostles, may we hear the call to discipleship.

All: May we forsake the old ways of our sin, and proclaim the gospel of new life to a broken world, through Jesus Christ and the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 62:5-12; Mark 1:14-20

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

- What might it mean that Jesus’ invitation to the Kingdom of God is connected to “repentance”?
- When Jesus calls the first disciples they leave both their nets and their father – does that mean discipleship asks us to leave behind our vocations and families, or perhaps to rethink our allegiance to them?
- Psalm 62 speaks of the soul “waiting” on God – are we only partially living until we join in God’s call for relationship and service?

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.