

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 of Christmas, acknowledging the gift of God in Jesus. May we journey together into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us.

Christmas

Monday, January 4

Read: Psalm 110

Reflection:

Jesus would quote from this psalm whenever religious authorities questioned *his* authority to do the kinds of things he was doing. Essentially, Jesus pointed to Scripture and said: “I am doing the LORD’s work.” Jesus didn’t need biblical affirmation for his mission, but those with power demanded evidence of his divine orientation.

This psalm served as a praise to the LORD’s rule in the world – God’s power to bring about righteousness in the land. God carried this action out through a messianic agent, an extension of God’s own presence on earth. Jesus lived as this human extension of God’s power – a living symbol of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Now, in Jesus’ physical absence, the Church continues this work of transforming this world for the Kingdom of God. Again, the emphasis is on *God’s power in us*, and not the other way around. Essentially, we can be like Jesus and say: “We are doing the *LORD’s* work” – and allow our discipleship to proclaim God’s righteousness in our lives. We are agents, *not* the agenda: “The LORD...will execute judgment among the nations” (v. 6).

Prayer: *God of Power, You are the source for change in the world; we are simply the means to that faithful end. Help us follow Your Messiah Jesus in pointing to Your righteousness in all things. Amen.*

Tuesday, January 5

Read: Luke 6:27-31

Reflection:

Can we really pray for those who curse us? Is loving one's enemy a reality or just some impossible ethical standard? Jesus didn't ask or call us to the impossible – he made *possible* our true existence as children of God. Jesus showed us the way and invited us into it.

The way of God's Kingdom subverts the ways of this world – it overturns “eye for eye” and the “me, myself and I” mentality to show us the sacred connection of *all* life. Love for one's enemy is simply another facet of love for one's neighbor – because all *are* neighbors in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is simply another name for what “neighborhood” truly looks like in the eyes of our Creator and Redeemer.

Because Jesus made possible this way, he also made it *practical*. When we love our enemies, we make the world more “open” – we removed boundaries and borders. Instead of war, we create peace – instead of competition, we create collaboration. If we are expecting heaven to be full of only people “like us,” I think we may be sorely disappointed by the Host's choice of dinner guests. But then again, so might our supposed “enemies.”

Prayer: *Holy God, Your love creates a new way, the true way. It seems radical, but it is the same love You showed us in the Cross and Resurrection. Amen.*

Wednesday, January 6 – “Epiphany”

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection:

Epiphany remembers the great “revelation” of God in the divine announcements of Jesus. The star leading the wise men of the East is traditionally celebrated by the Church Calendar, to remind us that God makes a way, even before we have drawn breath. The plans of God mysteriously stretch beyond our own lives into the sacred network of heaven and earth, connecting stories and causing holy disruption that makes possible a *new* creation.

God's promises are often threatened by those with worldly power. The announcement of “another king, another kingdom” puts an amount of fear into those whose reigns are dependent upon *unchallenged* authority. Yet God's plans are not so easily dismissed by the Herod's of the world. Like the Hebrew midwives who saved infants from destruction in Egypt, Rahab who took in the spies of Joshua, these Magi come from “beyond” the known story of God to participate in these promises for *all* humanity.

When light shines in the darkness, will we pay attention to it? Will we allow the “holy disruption” to cause us to pause and listen to God's Voice over and against the voices of earth? Maybe it's not always a shining star, but God shows up in ways that may be reminding us God has plans for us that will bring about new creation and *hope*, even in the midst of chaos.

Prayer: *LORD, help me to pay attention to Your Spirit, whispering in the wind, that I may do my part to help make way for King Jesus. Amen.*

Thursday, January 7

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Reflection:

This text presents another account for *listening* and *responding* to the voice of God. Sometimes, we need help recognizing that voice. Sometimes, we need help knowing how to respond to that voice. In this text, that help comes from an older generation to a younger. But it can just easily go the other way, too – or from one religion, culture, nation, gender, or class to another.

Listening requires *openness*, it necessitates learning *how* to listen and discern what God is calling, inviting us into. And when we really listen, that's how we know how to faithfully respond. Discernment *prepares* us for response – for that voice from God may not always be an invitation to the “happy-go-lucky” imagery of Hollywood or Hallmark.

The posture of “here am I” is one that God's people have wrestled with for ages, and yet this is the stance that leads us into Kingdom work. This receptivity to God's Spirit is how we serve as vessels for that same Spirit, and participate in the redemption of all the world.

Prayer: *Here we are, LORD – speak, for we are listening. And for the times when we do not or cannot, send us help to hear and respond more faithfully. Amen.*

Friday, January 8

Read: 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Reflection:

We all have been given gift(s) by God. The greatest challenge for us is not to “neglect” God's gift(s). It's something that can happen quite easily – we grow busy, weary, aged. Yet this letter to Timothy was a call to boldness and authenticity. It was a call to *be true*.

That gift does not change with age or experience, resources or location. It may adapt, sure, but it's there *within*. It's *who* God made us. Don't keep it in the dark. Don't hide it under a bushel basket. The Church works to empower and enabled its gifted Body to live into this truth.

Whatever our gift(s), we also have the gift of a *life*. Each of us has the opportunity to: “set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (v. 12). A life that does not embrace its giftedness or value is a life *wasted*. “Our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is” (Fred Rogers). Don't waste your gift.

Prayer: *Gift Giver, we thank You for what You share, and for what You have made. Help us to use such blessing and that no one is without the gift of life itself. Amen.*

Saturday, January 9

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 10 – Baptism of Our Lord - Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-169969> . Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Loving God, You brought us into being for relationship; though we often stumble on this journey, we give thanks for Your continual call to grace and fellowship.

All: May we strive for life with Christ, that in service unto Him, we find our communion with You and our connection to all the world. Amen.

Reflection: Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:9-11

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

- Rather than attempting to read the opening of Genesis as a textbook, imagine it as poetry where an Architect is putting together the “blueprints” for a world of communion.
- Mark’s Gospel’s first depiction of Jesus is this moment of baptism – how might such an image invite us to consider ourselves as “beloved?”
- What might it mean for our own ministries that Jesus begins not with a miracle or teaching, but an acceptance of God’s love and surrender to the Spirit’s embrace?

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.