

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 are approaching the Season of Lent. Traditionally taken as a reflective walk with Jesus to the Cross, this may be better seen as an invitation to witness God in our wilderness wanderings. Life is a Lenten Season, following Jesus on the road to redemption. May we journey together into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us.

Beginning of Lent

Monday, February 15

Read: Psalm 110

Reflection:

Who is at the LORD’s “right hand?” Sometimes we may believe it is *us* – that we’re the ones directing God’s actions in the world. Though we certainly are agents of God’s Spirit on earth, though we have been made members of Christ’s Body through faith – we are *not* God’s “chosen one.” We may be ministers, but we are *not* the Messiah.

Rather than us demand God’s direction in the world, perhaps we would do better to *listen* to God’s Spirit lead. *Jesus* is God’s Chosen – the full picture of what God’s Kingdom looks like. We must continually have Jesus show us the way – transforming our understanding of the world and shape our vision for discipleship.

It’s a blessed reminder that *because* Jesus sits at God’s hand, the burden is not on *us* to bring salvation. We are not called to *be* messiahs – we’re called to *follow* the Messiah. And when we feel the difficulty of this journey, remember: “The Lord is at *your* right hand” (v. 5).

Prayer: *God, though I place myself often atop of the pillars of Your creation, help me remember I’m a servant and not the savior. Yet the good news is that the Savior has come and is by our side. Amen.*

Tuesday, February 16

Read: 1 Timothy 3:14-16

Reflection:

The Tuesday before Lent is popularly known as “Fat Tuesday” – where households would cook up all the salt and fat in their goods before starting their “fast” for Lent. This text in Timothy uses the language of “household” to describe God’s people, for we have been brought into the

very heart and “house” of God. Fasting is an important spiritual practice precisely because it helps us shed some of the “unhealthy” additives to our lives – the “salt” and “fat” of selfish tendencies, prideful habits, and broken mindsets.

Belonging to the household of God is *pure gift* – never earned and never able to purchase. Yet because of such grace, we do have this call to allow Christ to shape and renew us. As we enter the Lenten season, it’s an opportunity to take seriously Christ’s hold over our lives and walk in His ways. We can have an honest review of our discipleship and see how much we have left to grow in order to embody our identity as God’s own.

This day is *not* an opportunity to be gluttonous before trying to draw closer to Christ. This is about taking stock of the fractures in our faith and prioritize those fruits of the Spirit that will help us discover God’s Kingdom anew and bring glory to Christ’s Name.

Prayer: *Help me shed the pieces of my life that are not healthy in my relationship with You, O God; and find the resources that will empower me for service to You and Your world. Amen.*

Wednesday, February 17 – “Ash Wednesday”

Read: Psalm 51:1-17

Reflection:

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, not to impose a sense of guilt over the next forty days or crush the spirits of God’s people, but to be *honest* with ourselves. Life is *not* a perfect picture – Lent shatters the illusion that we are flawless creatures in charge of our own destiny, nor do we need to strive to be. We are creatures of *dust* – we wound and carry the scars of our brokenness even as we attempt to try daily for new beginnings.

Yet our story is one where God *makes life from dust*. Our brokenness is not the overarching narrative – God’s *love* holds the center; God’s promise sustains us against despair. Though we are mortal, though we *will* die someday – death is *not* the last word.

We mark ourselves in dust to remember we sin, we struggle, we live and we die – yet God’s love *can* and *does* uphold all that wondrous existence. The story does not end in dust but *redemption*. We cannot avoid the Cross – it *is* the Christian journey. God’s love does not cease on Good Friday – it *continues on* in Easter Sunday. As we begin a new Lenten journey, we march toward the Cross, but know that Resurrection always lives on the dawn.

Prayer: *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, O LORD; and sustain me in a willing spirit. Amen.*

Thursday, February 18

Read: 1 John 1:3-10

Reflection:

Lent begins with an honest assessment of our mortality – that our lives are not inexhaustible or limitless. It also invites us to ponder our imperfection and discover afresh how grace truly *redeems*. Only in such honest reflection can we make way for that redemption, however.

If we claim that we have no need for growth or redemption, we're living a lie. If we say to God's love, "I'm good – there are other people who need Your help" – we're essentially deceiving ourselves and making the gift of God's grace into some sort of product we can pass on or ignore at the "store" of life.

Yet when we open ourselves to what the light of God reveals, see our *actual* need for transformation, we discover the sheer *blessing* that God is stretching out for us to grasp. It's like spending your life with your head buried in the sand and then realizing you are standing on the beach with an endless ocean before you. Lent declares: "Come on in, the water's fine."

Prayer: *God, I'm done hiding away from Your grace – may I be ever open to Your redemption and rescue over me. Because the truth is, I really do need it. Amen.*

Friday, February 19

Read: Psalm 25:1-10

Reflection:

The psalmist depicts the bold invitation of Lent: *come close*. Come close to God's bleeding heart for the world. Come close to Jesus who abides with us no matter our circumstance or journey. Come close and do not be afraid.

Drawing closer to God also requires we draw closer to our faults and our continual need for change. When we lean into the Divine, we have to wrestle with the ugly bits of our lives, delivering them over to the God who *welcomes* all that we are. There's no need to hide anymore – God is offering forgiveness *not* retribution. God is offering *new* life.

The challenge of Lent is about truth and reconciliation. Discerning the truth of our very selves and embracing the reconciliation of God's love, in and through our own – these are the twin sides of the Lenten journey. We need not keep God at a distance, or hide away behind false versions of ourselves and our faith. Let's follow Jesus and come *close* to God.

Prayer: *All Your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness, but I have to be willing enough to walk them, with an open heart and an open life. Help me come close, O LORD, and see how widely outstretched are Your arms of grace. Amen.*

Saturday, February 20

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, February 21 Worship: 10:30 a.m. “1st Sunday of Lent”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-646037> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of promise, we open ourselves to You in this Lenten season, recognizing our frailty before Your awesome power. Yet You are not a god of destruction, but One who redeems and makes all things new.

All: May Your love create in us new beginnings of righteousness and life. Throughout these forty days, unseal within us the wellspring of Your grace and cause Your new creation to flourish in our discipleship. Amen.

Reflection: Genesis 9:8-15; Mark 1:12-13

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

- What connections do you see between God’s promise against destruction and the hope of Resurrection to which Lent leads us?
- The universal scope of God’s promise might make us consider how Lent invites us to see our connectedness to all life; how does following more closely to Christ fulfill this scope?
- Mark offers the most simplistic portrayal of Jesus’ temptation – what and where do we find our “wilderness,” and how are such experiences a time of testing?

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.