

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 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.

Lent

Monday, March 8

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Reflection:

We are always continuing the ministry of Jesus. What God began from the creation of the world with this plan for redemption and rescue, we are building on that foundation of love. Life will test our additions to that structure. Today’s Scripture speaks of “fire” – not as condemnation, but *refinement*. The effectiveness of our own ministries will be shaped by the fires of God’s Spirit.

It’s a reminder to me that my discipleship is a *process*, not a product. It cannot remain stationary, but must be *fluid* so as to allow the Spirit to form and reform it according to the endurance of God’s Kingdom. It’s reassuring, too, knowing that our limited lives stand against God’s eternal love – that the seeds we plant in this life are nourished in the soil of God’s Spirit.

None of us are the Architect – it’s unlikely we will ever see the completion of that great structure of God’s redemption of the world in our lifetimes. Yet one day, *all* of us *will see* – when Glory comes, we shall gaze at the Kingdom *fully*, and perhaps God the Architect will point out all the nooks and crannies we helped carve along with way.

Prayer: *Our lives and this world are Your Temple, O God. Help us to maintain it, but only so as to build on what Jesus has brought to completion. Amen.*

Tuesday, March 9

Read: 2 Chronicles 29:1-11

Reflection:

Hezekiah is a faithful ruler, not because of the prominence of his political campaigns or the strength of his economic programs – but because his center is formed by *relationship to God*. His focus on the Temple is a testament to an ethical commitment to keep God’s Law not only

personally but as a community – to truly *be* God’s people. Historians may call that sort of rule theocratic – God-centered; but religious scholars and theologians call this the archetype for the Davidic kings: humans fulfilling their call as God’s *stewards* on earth.

Stewards are *caretakers*, not tyrants. Their rule is not only intended to care for what God has created, but also to witness *in* that rule the very character of God. The Temple was a microcosm for creation – the world was *sculpted* into the stones and architecture to always relate what the people did in worship to their lives *out* in the world.

Hezekiah, and David before him, were called to that same sort of rule-worship relationship. The way they led Israel was the way that Israel was called to live in light of *God’s* rule. It makes us wonder about our own rulers and our own stewardship. Can one look at our lives and see that connection between worship and community – the Kingdom of God and our own “little” kingdoms? Perhaps we need to maintain that sort of “kingly” attention to detail.

Prayer: *May we not be negligent, O LORD, for we all have been chosen to live out Your rule on earth in our very own lives. Amen.*

Wednesday, March 10

Read: Mark 11:15-19

Reflection:

Why *is* Jesus so angry at the Temple – why does he “let loose” at the makeshift markets? Perhaps in that moment he bore that “wrath of God” people love/hate to talk about – but perhaps truly he embodied God’s *pain* at seeing us make “business” out of our faith.

The Temple was not a place for people who could *afford* it – it was supposed to be the heart of *all* peoples access to God, not a buy-and-sell store for “religion.” Jesus turned over the tables of the moneychangers because God’s grace is *free*. God’s love is *not* a stock exchange, that raises and lowers based on supposed values of resources and desires. It is the very *life* of the world.

Yet grace is *costly* – it asks us to live *not* by the world’s economies and instead live by the heart of God. Grace makes us cease our efforts to “measure up” and instead come face to face with our true identity as God’s Beloved. That kind of reflection is transformative because it states we no longer live by the values of *others*, and instead it makes us *value others*, and raise up those who have been laid low. Grace is *cross-shaped*: freely-given and freely-received.

Prayer: *May our tables not have weighted scales and reserved seats, Gracious Host. May we cease making faith a market, and instead see it for the beautiful call to communion Jesus has embodied. Amen.*

Thursday, March 11

Read: Ephesians 1:3-6

Reflection:

“Destined for adoption” (v. 5) is an outstanding concept when you think about it. To have God’s plan for us be *communion* and not condemnation is extraordinary. God destines us to be part of the family, to belong, to *matter* – and so often we act as if *our* ideas of destiny are far better than anything God could ever cook up.

Yet God writes it into our very being for us to find a *home* in God’s heart. Our true name is “child” in the household of God. Christ shared his life with ours that our eyes would be open to that gift. Why do we spend so much of our lives chasing value and vindication when it is just waiting in God’s arms for us to come and *claim* it?

If *our* destiny is bound up in God’s eternal love, then don’t you think the other part of this story is that *their* destiny is, too? After all, the very creation of an “us” also creates a “them” – and we all carry around a whole armload of “them’s.” Yet it is to the “pleasure” (v. 5) of God to welcome *all* of us into gracious belonging.

Prayer: *According to Your pleasure, and not mine, may I share in that invitation to embrace our true destiny in You, O LORD. Amen.*

Friday, March 12

Read: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Reflection:

Have you ever “drawn near to the gates of death?” (v. 18) During this pandemic, it may certainly have felt like it at times – death of routine, normalcy, fellowship. This season has laid so many of our spirits bare and found ourselves wanting nourishment that feels *absent* everywhere else.

Yet this psalm proclaims the LORD’s goodness precisely *because* God comes to us *in* our thirst. Our prayers may not be answered with literal bread or water, but God provides the gift of God’s *own presence* to abide. God gives of God’s Self *to us* in order to love us *through* our pain.

Lent makes us aware that we belong to a God who will journey with us *into* our desperation and exhaustion. When we’ve reached our limits, we see the world with different sets of eyes. With such renewed sight we see the same God as the Crucified One who stands in *solidarity* with our suffering, in order that the word of life may come and heal us.

Prayer: *I will tell of Your deeds of redemption, God; for I was caught in the ways of death and You reached into the depths and brought me up to new life through Your Son. Amen.*

Saturday, March 13

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, March 14 Worship: 10:30 a.m. – 4th Sunday of Lent

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-243425> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Gracious God, in order that we might discern good from evil, You sent Christ to be the light of the world. As Christ shines upon us, may we learn and live truth and goodness, for the building up of Your Kingdom.

All: As Christ is lifted up in our lives, may we share His light through service and love, walking together by the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

Reflection: John 3:14-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

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

- Read Numbers 21 to understand the reference to Moses and the serpent, in relation to Jesus being “lifted up” (v. 14) – how are both these images symbols of “deliverance?”
- This passage from John is part of a larger conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus – how might Jesus be challenging Nicodemus to see “anew” concerning his ministry?
- How does the text from Ephesians portray discipleship as a journey from “death” to “life?” Does that have any consideration for the season of Lent?

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.