

## **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 Easter. We join Jesus in this gift of new life, through the hope of the Resurrection. May we journey together in this new creation that Christ has brought us by the power of Holy Spirit.*

### **Easter**

#### **Monday, April 12**

Read: Daniel 3

Reflection:

This is a story about two competing “gods” – it’s told in many places throughout Scripture, but here it comes down to a fiery furnace. The “god” of empires and worldly power does not take kindly to those who will not “bow” to them, yet that’s precisely what devotion to the God of Israel requires. The God of Jesus Christ does *not* bow to *any*.

Will we face the “flames” for such devotion? Will we run the risk of ostracization and being put on display for public ridicule? We applaud Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Sunday School, but will we really follow their example in our own stories?

We are never told the identity of the “fourth” person in the furnace with our three heroes, but allusions are made to the Divine presence. Perhaps we could take the biblical imagination one step further and say this was even a foreshadow of the Word who would one day show us that allegiance to God looks like a cross. So, what “god” will we follow in this life? The one of the king’s furnace or the One who stands amid the flames *with* us?

Prayer: *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. May we have strength to yield up our bodies rather than serve and worship any god except You. Amen.*

#### **Tuesday, April 13**

Read: Psalm 135

Reflection:

This psalm teaches us lessons we should have picked up on from Daniel’s narrative – that the “gods” of the nations have mouths, but they do *not* speak; they have eyes, but they do *not* see; they have ears, but they do *not* hear, and there is no breath in their mouths” (v. 16-17). It’s an important reminder that anything we worship “outside” of God is nothing more than a decoration – it’s creation *not* the Creator.

The beauty of this world is important, and we can celebrate it in all its various forms. Yet *worship*, that is, a relational devotion and discipleship to, must belong *solely* to our God. Anything else, and those things that we may own or venerate will start to “own” us. Only the Creator God is worthy of our allegiance, for in God’s life are we made truly *free*.

Psalm 135 offers praise where praise is due, and that’s an important lesson for us in our interaction with the world. When do our passions and projects become allegiance to that which is *not* God? When do our relationships and ideologies shift from their Source in God to becoming “gods” in themselves? Discipleship is a balancing act – the continual attempt to know *who* we are by knowing *Whose* we are.

Prayer: *For I know that the Lord is great; our Lord is above all gods. Help me to live this daily. Amen.*

## **Wednesday, April 14**

Read: Mark 12:18-27

Reflection:

This conversation is an example of biblical dialogue in the ancient world (and still part of the Jewish tradition today). It approaches scholarship and theology as *conversations*, not as *commands* or *creeds*. The Sadducees pose a scenario to Jesus who in turn counters that scenario with a different course in the narrative understanding of Scripture. Jesus does not answer the Sadducees’ question because it seems they’re asking the “wrong” question.

What if instead of right or wrong *answers*, it’s our questions that are *misguided* – what if we’re after the wrong things? What if, like the Sadducees, we’re obsessed with the rewards and the rituals rather than the *relationships*? Jesus’ point seems to be God as the “goal” of resurrection – not regaining our previous earthly “holdings.” Maybe there’s more to that view than just eschatology – maybe this kind of thinking matters for *all* of our Christian theology and practice?

What questions *are* we asking, and what are the answers we’re set on finding? Is relationship with God the “goal” in any of our pursuits, or is it self-seeking? Maybe it’s time to start preparing ourselves to have Jesus assertively “not” answer our questions.

Prayer: *God of all life, keep me fixated on You so I do not lose myself in selfish undertakings, but find my way into Your Way. Amen.*

## **Thursday, April 15**

Read: Psalm 4

Reflection:

How might we claim the last line of this text faithfully after all we have been through and all we have left to undergo in this pandemic? “I will both lie down and sleep in peace” (v. 8) – both these tasks have not always come easily to me over the past year. Yet such tranquility comes *not* from one’s circumstances, but from *trust* in God’s abiding power.

Just as Easter morning signaled to the disciples that God *had not* abandoned Jesus to the grave, so does the Resurrection signal to all of us that God *dwells*. Our circumstances may not be altered, but our *communion with God* is *secure*. We are not those who need fear death’s lordship – though the grave remains, its power has been lost to God’s eternal hope.

In the words of the band, Kansas: “Lay your weary head to rest, don’t you cry no more” (*Carry On*). Or if we want to heed a better source: “Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Jesus cf. Matthew 11:28).

Prayer: *May I rest not in my own ability or certainty, but in Your eternal power to triumph and make all things new. Amen.*

## **Friday, April 16**

Read: Acts 3:1-10

Reflection:

The experience of the Risen Jesus transformed the disciples from fearful and full of doubt to those who *bore* the power of Christ’s life in and through their own. Peter, the same one who denied Jesus, now offers him *unashamedly* to those seeking restoration. Peter knows firsthand that this Jesus can bring someone from “death” to “life” – from those without hope to those who may have a second chance at creation.

Their power comes not only in their words, but in their ability to reach out and touch lives just as Jesus had done to theirs. They extend hands of healing and fellowship just as their Master had done, and now they know that *to serve* is the meaning of his last commandment to them. They came to Jesus as servants and they are sent out as servants, but also *friends*. These are those who stand *with* Jesus in the renewed household of God.

The power of our *friendship* should not be overlooked – the sacred act of *community* is Christ’s gift to us and *for* us to share with *all*. Our task is not only to “proclaim” Jesus as Lord, but to live under his rule of love and generosity, extending the power of the Risen One from the tomb to the Temple and everywhere in between.

Prayer: *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the LORD – may I share that sight with the world through my daily acts of service and love in Your Name. Amen.*

## Saturday, April 17

There are no texts for today. Rather, practice a true “Sabbath” and rest in the knowledge of God’s goodness and power to sustain all things, even when we “rest.”

Prayer: *Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, for You are good, and Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

## Sunday, April 18 Worship 10:30 a.m. – “Third Sunday of Easter”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-441558> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

### Call to Worship

Leader: Living Christ, You make Your presence known through the community of faith, that in our serving together we reveal God’s Chosen One to the world.

**All: May we reveal the love of God in our lives, as Your Spirit has made us the hands and feet of Christ to carry on His ministry and message of Your Kingdom. Amen.**

**Reflection:** Luke 24:36-48; Acts 3:1-10

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

- How does the Risen Jesus’ physicality have implications for the ways in which we consider our own ministries?
- What might it mean that the word for “witnesses” in Greek is the same root for where we get our word for “martyr” – what kind of commitment involves that sort of self-giving?
- In the Acts’ episode, Peter offers nothing but the “name” of Jesus – how do you understand the power of Jesus’ Name?

### 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.**