

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 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 19

Read: 1 John 3:10-16

Reflection:

The writer of this letter uses strong language – because the power of Christ’s life in our own has *strong* consequences. “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death” (v. 14). How do we know Resurrection is at work in us? If we follow Jesus’ words to Peter: “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17).

Love can never be mere sentiment in the Christian community – it is the very *testament* of our relationship to the Risen One. Love is the language we speak, the acts which *reveal* God’s Spirit *dwelling* within our very lives. This pandemic has called many aspects of our society into question – one of the foremost being, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9).

Does our sense of personal freedom trump Christ’s call to love? Does our “self” have priority over the life of our neighbor? The Resurrection is the ultimate affirmation that Christ’s willingness to face death *for* the world *is* the way of God’s Kingdom. If we claim to believe in Jesus, if we say that He truly is our Savior – then love *for* others will be *our* affirmation.

Prayer: *We know love by this, that You laid down Your life for us—help us to lay down our lives for one another. Amen.*

Tuesday, April 20

Read: Hosea 5:15-6:6

Reflection:

Hosea’s prophetic discourse reveals the fickleness of human beings, portrayed by the stories of Israel. How easily we are drawn to other “lovers” who tempt us – worldly powers that offer the illusion of comfort, security, and value. We raise these idols up as our redeemers, when our true salvation comes from the LORD our Maker – the One who *first* loved us.

Yet this same God whom we so often reject in pursuit of ourselves *will not abandon*. This God, though hurt by our unfaithfulness, *continues to abide*, promising rescue from our reckless loves. It's Hosea's vision and story that Jesus embodies in his own life – one who lived entirely for others is put to death *by the ones he came to save*.

Again, God offers *not* condemnation but *restoration*. God's judgment may bring us face to face with our illisiveness and lack of loyalty, but in that "dying" to our sin, God *can* and *does* make us new. "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (6:2).

Prayer: *LORD, forgive us our unfaithfulness toward You and one another. Help us see that You alone are our true Redeemer, and that apart from You, there can be no restoration. May we turn to You so that we may be healed in Your mercy. Amen.*

Wednesday, April 21

Read: Psalm 23

Reflection:

Is there anything more that can be said about this beloved text? Can't it just speak for itself? Perhaps it can – perhaps these words are an invitation to "let go," and simply *follow* that voice of the Divine Shepherd. Don't feel pressured to build up a spiritual "workout" or "to-do-list" based off this psalm – just *dwell*.

The act of surrender may be one of the most difficult spiritual disciplines – and yet this whole text is devoted to surrendering *our way* for the *Way* of the Shepherd. To be *led*, not to lead – to be *sat*, not to prepare the table ourselves. So much of our culture focuses on the "doing" that we rarely take time for the "being." Let's simply sit with this invitation and "be."

"I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me" (v. 4). Don't be afraid, for *God is with us*. Dwell with that power, and watch how our doing transforms from flowing out of such *being*.

Prayer: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, because I am Yours. Where You go, there I shall follow. Amen.*

Thursday, April 22

Read: Acts 4:1-4

Reflection:

Notice that the annoyance with the disciples from the Sadducees comes *not* from their preaching of Jesus as *Lord*, but rather that there *is* resurrection of the dead. For the Sadducees, their denial

of an afterlife stemmed from their *control in this life*. They needed no “other world” because they had comfort and security in *this one*, and they fought hard to *retain it*.

The Resurrection, however, calls into account everything in this life *because there will be another*. This life matters *because new creation affirms it*. Those who abuse power and harm others to *retain* their power will face *judgment* at the recreation of the world. Thus, the Sadducees challenged the disciples on their proclamation, just as they challenged the Pharisees for their teaching of an afterlife.

Does our discipleship bear similar criticism because we challenge those who live like there is *no* judgment – *no* accountability for their abuse of power and creation? Christ is not only the Risen One, He is truly the Judge of living and dead, the first of what’s to come – and as such, we measure our work in the world by *His* life, death and resurrection. May we boldly affirm the dignity of this life, because it will one day be glorified with Christ’s Return.

Prayer: *Our proclamation may draw the ire of worldly powers, but may we never fear to speak or live of what we have experienced in You. Amen.*

Friday, April 23

Read: Mark 6:30-43

Reflection:

It’s interesting that after everything the disciples had experienced in following Jesus – the miracles and power of his teaching – when it came time to care for the crowds, their first response was: “send them away” (v. 36). Had they really learned *anything*?

When we claim to “know” Jesus and carry His power in our lives, Jesus may offer us the test: “You give them something to eat” (v. 38). If we know firsthand the wonder of the Gospel, why do we look for someone *else* to care for others? Why do we place the burden of responsibility on businesses or governments, instead of taking up our neighbors’ lives in our *own* hands and feed them with the same bread Jesus gave us?

The real miracle, I think, was not the multiplication of loaves and fishes, but the expansion of the disciples’ view of *who* was part of their circle of concern. Jesus’ charge to us is not only preaching the message of His life, but to bring that message to fruition in our own living. When we see crowds of needy folk, will we have “compassion for them, because they are like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34)

Prayer: *May I hold Your teachings so dear, LORD, that I bring them out in my daily life – that I see and respond to the world with the love You shared. May I proclaim the Shepherd by caring for all Your sheep. Amen.*

Saturday, April 24

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 25 Worship 10:30 a.m. – “Fourth Sunday of Easter”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-226109> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: God of all power, You called from death our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Send us now as shepherds to rescue and heal the broken, feeding one another with the love and life of the Risen One.

All: By Your Spirit, guide us in service to Your world, feeding our fellow sheep with steadfast love and mercy. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 23; John 10:11-18

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

- What makes the image of the Shepherd “good?” How does Jesus fit this portrayal?
- What do you envision when Jesus claims there’s sheep of “another flock” that he must bring in also? How does this take shape in your own discipleship?
- What ways do you experience God “shepherding” you in life and faith?

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.