

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, May 3

Read: Isaiah 5:1-7

Reflection:

When we realize the prophet is depicting God’s heartache *for us* – we might see God’s relationship to the world in a new light. There’s no way to reconcile images of God as impartial or distant when we consider the poetic core of Scripture – God as *Lover*. God’s relationship to us closer as a *devoted* Creator and Sustainer – and that’s where our struggle comes in.

God is *involved* in our existence, and when our path strays from God’s vision – there are consequences. Our tradition might label those consequences “sin,” but we might also think of it through the lens of “weeds” and “wild growth” if we borrow the text’s imagery of a vineyard. Departing from God’s intended growth creates a web of distortion in our lives that we have to deal with.

Lest we think that this narrative ends in God’s anger at our “off-shoots,” remember that Christ appears as the “the Gardener” (John 20:15) ready to tend and care for our growth so that we produce fruits of justice and righteousness once more.

Prayer: *Tend to Your rebellious creation, O LORD, and care for Your vineyard so that we produce the fruit of Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 4

Read: Isaiah 32:14-20

Reflection:

God’s vision always extends *beyond* the destruction our actions bring about. God’s promises *new creation* – even when our traditions and theologies choose to end in judgment, *God’s* judgment is a *renewed world*. The assurance that God *wills* restoration should never excuse us from working towards *joining* God in such recreative efforts.

Another assurance is that God not only promises a future restoration, God's Spirit *assists* in that promise. We are not left to fend for ourselves, but God *equips* and *empowers* us to commit to restoration, too. When we look around and see the devastation of the world, do not despair! Pick up your gardening tools and sewing kits, roll up your sleeves, and get back to work.

Part of this vision speaks of God's righteousness being revealed *even in* wilderness. That's good news for a world attempting to transition from a viral pandemic – no matter the state of things, God's Spirit *abides*. We need to prepare our sight to experience glimpses of God's future *breaking through* – encouraging us to keep walking after God's vision.

Prayer: *Sometimes, we grow weary by the desolation wrought by our sin – yet give us strength to live into the hope for Your new creation. Make us participants in Your restoring work. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 5

Read: John 14:18-31

Reflection:

The Season of Easter reminds us that the Risen One *never* leaves us “orphaned” (v. 18). Though the physical Jesus no longer walks with us, His Spirit *meets us* in the physical realm. God's Kingdom has always involved flesh and spirit meeting – heaven and earth coming *together* in tangible moments. Jesus' promise for that Spirit is further sign that our connection to God's life within our own is *inseparable*.

We are a *communion* people – our identity comes from this divine-human link that *makes* us a “family” of the Holy Spirit. The Resurrected Lord unites us to that power of God which raised him from death, and now daily *raises us* to a new sense of purpose and belonging. Christ's work *becomes* our work. Christ's life *becomes* our life. Nothing after Easter is untouched by this connection – *no one* stands outside this offering of love.

What does it mean to you that, regardless of your own biology, you have a *place* always in God's heart? What does it mean to hear that you have a *person* – no matter where or how you find yourself – that Jesus is forever *for you*? Discipleship might just be the lifelong exploration of this identity and attempting to live into its graces.

Prayer: *Never am I alone because of You, O LORD. Amen.*

Thursday, May 6

Read: Psalm 98

Reflection:

What does it mean to “sing a new song” (v. 1) – how is your life *different* after Jesus? Does it dawn on us that truly *every day* is a new opportunity to live God’s Kingdom vision? That life itself is this *glorious gift* to be loved and to love in return?

The psalmist sang of the LORD’s victory, not only in their experience of the present, but in their hope for the *future*. God was the true King over all creation, and God’s rule was breaking into the world now and one day would be exclaimed over *everything*. Easter puts us in this mindset – that God has won a great victory for us, and *every day* we are called to rejoice in that win. We also one day look forward to the *final* triumph when God’s rule becomes eternally *immanent*.

When our circumstances are grim, praise is difficult, to say the least. Yet making a “joyful noise” (v. 4) does not mean an erasure of pain. Rather, it is acknowledgment of the greater picture that gives us strength to face our hardships, knowing that the battle may be before us, but the war has already been won.

Prayer: *May my discipleship pronounce clearly Your rule – first now and every day until Your Kingdom fully comes. Amen.*

Friday, May 7

Read: Isaiah 42:5-9

Reflection:

God’s *resiliency* is a marvel. It’s easy to overlook, because after all, God is *God*, right? It makes sense that God is so undeterred. Yet the beauty of the prophetic insight is that we are *shown* this resiliency – we are gifted with the imagery of God’s faithfulness.

Why such pictures *matter* in terms of discipleship is that God wants us to *know* God’s faithfulness – God wants us to *rest* in that commitment to our good. We can sing all we want of “great is thy faithfulness,” but it’s truly how we *live into* that belief that reveals the intentions of our hearts. To live in a reckless manner *without* consideration for the consequences of our actions and their impact on our various relationships shows we are living out of selfish conceit rather than communion with God’s steadfast love.

God’s glory is revealed in the transformation of the world, from brokenness to wholeness. How we *share* in that redemption is how we honor God’s assurance. How *we* commit to God’s commitment to justice and peace reveals the depths of our discipleship and the extent of *our* faithfulness. In other words, the fruit of our lives declares whether we believe God has called us in “righteousness” (v. 6) or merely “spiritual” (otherworldly) reward.

Prayer: *Praise be to You, O Glorious One – give us the faith to live out Your assurance to us, and join in Your commitment to the restoration of this world. Amen.*

Saturday, May 8

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, May 9 Worship 10:30 a.m. – “Sixth Sunday of Easter”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-904327> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Holy One, You have made a place for us – given us a home in Your heart. Pour into our hearts love for You that spills over onto all that we do, that we bear the fruit of Your Kingdom around us.

All: May Your Spirit equip us to grow according to Your Word, and live out the love You have shown in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reflection: John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48

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

- How does Jesus frame “love” as essential to his “commandments?”
- In Acts, why is so astonishing that the Holy Spirits in being poured out on the Gentiles? What barriers do we keep to those who are experiencing the Holy Spirit?
- What might it mean that, though we are disciples (students / servants), Jesus also calls us “friends?” What kind of intimacy and responsibility does friendship entail?

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.