

Daily Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” We have now come to Pentecost, the Season of the Church. By the Holy Spirit’s power, we journey together in this new creation that Christ has brought us, and seek a renewed discipleship every day.

Pentecost

Monday, June 7

Read: 1 Samuel 7:3-15

Reflection:

There’s a lot of stories, especially in the Old Testament, about Israel and the competition with other “gods.” I think that same competition exists still today; even if we don’t have as vast mythologies anymore demanding our allegiance, there’s still plenty of “idols” that get in the way of our relationship with God.

Samuel, and other figures like him, “judged” Israel by helping bring their loyalty *back into focus* with God. For Israel, that literally looked like throwing out all the household figurines and carved idols representing other gods. For us, it might look like us bringing our relationships, work, play time, and politics all *into* their proper dominion *under* God.

We get that really cool word “Ebenezer” (the one we sing about during Christmastime) from this passage. It literally means in Hebrew “stone of help” – for the rock that Samuel places serves as a tangible sign of God *as* Israel’s Rock. What might we use for *our* Ebenezer’s? How can we acknowledge that God and God *alone* is truly the source of our life, and appropriately bring all that we are into true devotion *to* God?

Prayer: *May I see the “stones” of Your help piled up all around me, O LORD, and with such reminders as these, continue committing my life into Your blessed hands. Amen.*

Tuesday, June 8

Read: 1 Samuel 8

Reflection:

The story of Israel’s king is truly fascinating. We’re left with a sense of neither “yes” nor “no” in terms of Divine favor of human leadership. Samuel, the prophet of God, is certainly perturbed over Israel’s wishes – yet God seems to relent to such rebellion, declaring: “they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (v. 7).

I think this sort of ambivalence about human authority is the healthy sort of skepticism we can maintain even today. God has relented to there being chosen leaders over communities, and yet

at the same time, we are warned what happens when those same rulers choose *perversion* over justice. This chapter begins a long history of the Bible's take on *fallen* human rulers.

Whether we have a concept of "kingship" or not, it's important to recall that God *is God* – not our governments, not celebrities, not any figure in the public spotlight. We may admire and even adhere to those figures, but let's do so *through* the lens that biblical theology has given us. Let's live as citizens of *God's Kingdom*, living as caring strangers and migrants in *this* world.

Prayer: *LORD God Almighty, may I hold to Your authority first and foremost, and judge all earthly rulers by how they adhere to Your vision of peace and justice. Amen.*

Wednesday, June 9

Read: Luke 11:14-28

Reflection:

I'll be honest – this portion of gospel text *stumps* me. Why all this association with Jesus and evil spirits? Also, what help to the situation do verses 24 through 26 bring? After rereading these passages and placing them within their larger context, I've found what I *think* might be going on: sometimes, we're willing to say *anything* to avoid the truth.

Claiming that what Jesus was doing was by the power of evil spirits was a way to avoid dealing with the reality of what was happening. God's power was being evoked before their very eyes. Yet that kind of authentic embrace of God *in our midst* is scary, isn't it? So scary that instead of a good God showing up, we'd rather address the whole thing to *demons*.

Jesus shows us that such a division within our own hearts will not last. Even if we can free ourselves from those lies, if we truly do not embrace God's power, those same demons will return with *greater* numbers. Perhaps this episode is a call to confession: God *is* showing up, and we need to *deal with it*. God wants to deal with our pain – will we allow it?

Prayer: *Blessed are we when we open ourselves to Your Word and allow it to truly teach and transform us, O God. Amen.*

Thursday, June 10

Read: Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

Reflection:

Some translations title this passage: "A Song for the Sabbath Day." Do we praise God *in our rest*? Do we realize that Sabbath is God's gift to us that we *do not* have to have *all* the answers? We *do not* have to solve all the world's problems or work ourselves to death – God has created space in the order of creation *to rest*.

That rest is not *exempt* from praising the Giver of this peace, however. “For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy” (v. 4). Following Sabbath and resting *from* our labors is a way to thank God for those same gifts of work and accomplishment, both of which flow *from* God.

Sabbath is a work of God’s hands, along with all creation, and we need to make room for appropriate praise of God’s glory in *all* these good things. Praise does not have to look like music or messaging; any *act* in which our toil is directed to the glorifying of God *is* praise. Those acts can also include the *refraining from further acting*, which is where the word “shabbat” comes from in the first place.

Prayer: *May I appropriately cease my labors, that I may pause to give breath to the wonders of Your love. Amen.*

Friday, June 11

Read: Hebrews 11:4-7

Reflection:

This whole chapter in Hebrews connects belief to *action*. Faith is not a merely intellectual exercise or something ethereal – it is *grounded in lived existence*. “By faith” people take further steps on life’s journey, encountering God in new and unexpected ways. Yet always it is through the sacred act of *living* that such belief comes through.

The examples presented are ones we often characterize through pictures in children’s stories than deal with the *darker realities* of these tales. Abel was *slain* by his brother – Enoch simply wandered off the face of the earth – and Noah gets on a boat while the *world drowns*. Yet each of these instances is *also* that Divine display that what they sought in life, it was only *in* the arms of *God* that it could ever truly be embraced.

Perhaps faith, then, is not just our lived pursuit of God’s dreams in and through our own. Perhaps it is also leaning into the reality (and the hope) that our lives are only a partial picture – that in the end, it is *God and God alone* who will *complete* what we have begun. This by no means diminishes *our* efforts or calls us away from attempting daily discipleship. It’s just the honest balance that faith is a “both/and” – the living out *now* of what may only be fully embraced *one day*.

Prayer: *Gracious Creator, we commit our lives to Your future – help us live our beliefs boldly in the present until the day when we see in full through Your Kingdom finally come. Amen.*

Saturday, June 12

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, June 13 Worship 10:30 a.m. – “4th Sunday of Pentecost”

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-912766> or in-person (with safety protocols). Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Gracious God, You alone know the story of our lives – may we trust in Your abiding presence, through good times and bad, victory and defeat, always extending love on our behalf.

All: May we journey together as Your people, bound by Your promise, and sharing Your Spirit’s power with all we encounter. Amen.

Reflection: Mark 4:26-34; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

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

- In what sense does Jesus’ use of parables invite us to live with the tension of not having absolute certainty in our discipleship??
- What about mystery does God’s Kingdom utilize for our understanding? Is there a sense that even though we do not (and perhaps cannot) know, we can trust in God to fulfill?
- How does Christ’s love “urge us on” (2 Corinthians 5:14)?

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.