



New Mission Statement Devotions

Devotion 5 – Joining God’s Reign of justice and radical love for the world

Invite individuals to share their biggest concerns about the world today. What do they believe are the challenges that cause the greatest harm?

Read each Scripture passage slowly, inviting participants to pay attention to the word, phrases, images, and questions that arise within them as they hear these verses from the Bible. Pause after each reading, allowing time for people to share those words or phrases.

Scripture Readings:

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

³to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11



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⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Luke 1:46-56

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Revelation 21: 1-7

Reflection

While we build churches and temples, sanctuaries and cathedrals to worship and honor God, we know that God is not contained within the walls of buildings made by human hands. As creator of the universe, God is the breath, the wind, the Spirit that blows throughout creation bringing life. In other words, God is active in the world. God reigns in the world.



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The good news that Jesus proclaims in his very first sermon, the ultimate meaning of the good news is that God's reign, God's kingdom, is near. God's kingdom is about God's justice. We see that clearly in the gospel of Luke where the writer emphasizes the privileged position of the poor. In fact, Luke's Gospel is sometimes called the "Gospel of the Poor" or the "Gospel of Mercy" for Jesus is portrayed as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61 – anointed to bring good news to the afflicted, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. . . .

Brian McLaren in his book *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* ponders, in reference to the stories of Elizabeth and Mary at the

beginning of Luke's gospel: *What if their purpose is to challenge us to blur the line between what we think is possible and what we think is impossible? Could we ever come to a time when swords would be beaten into plowshares? When the predatory people in power – the lions – would lie down in peace with the vulnerable and the poor – the Lambs? When God's justice would flow like a river – to the lowest and most "god-forsaken" places on Earth? When the brokenhearted would be comforted and the poor would receive good news? If you think Never – it's impossible, then maybe you need to think again. Maybe it's not too late for something beautiful to be born. Maybe the present moment is pregnant with possibilities we can't see or even imagine.*

It is clear throughout Scripture that God cares about justice, justice for the poor, the widows, the orphans, the stranger, the oppressed. We have individualized and disconnected faith from the realities, the brokenness, the hurts of this world reducing our calling as people of God to individual piety and acts of charity, putting up a wall between the "secular world" of politics, systems, laws, and public policies and the "spiritual world" of coming to church, confessing belief in Jesus and loving God. The God we love, came to dwell with us, to make God's home among us and call us to lives of justice where everyone has a place at the table.

One of my favorite songs is entitled: "A Place at the Table." The verses call us to words and actions that make a place for everyone at the table, for everyone to thrive and grow and be loved. The refrain is:

*And God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy.*

Justice and joy – they belong together.
Justice and the gospel – they belong together.
Justice and love – they belong together.

That's what God's reign is all about.



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Questions for Discussion:

1. How would you describe God's reign in the world? What would it look like?
2. What does the statement "politics should not be preached from the pulpit" evoke in you? Is there a difference between partisan politics and the church making a public stand on a social issue?
3. How do you feel we, as people of faith, ought to participate in God's reign of justice? What are our responsibilities?

Closing Prayer:

Enlighten those who possess power and money, that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your kingdom of justice, peace, love, and beauty. Amen

(A Prayer of Pope Francis, *All Creation Sings*, p. 48)



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