

Hello everyone! Happy Wednesday! Welcome to our first Wednesday Word weekly devotion video series! Every Wednesday for the foreseeable future, I will come on Facebook Live at noon to lead you in a time of devotion. We will have words of prayer, scripture, meditation, and I will encourage you to engage in a spiritual practice each week as well. Even if you can't make it to the videos right away at noon, that's no trouble at all - you can access the videos any time, as they will be saved to our Facebook page, they will be linked on our website, and a full PDF transcript will also be available for you on our website, which is mtzionhudson.com. I would encourage you to check out the written PDF resource too, as a reference for the spiritual practice and some questions for contemplation and prayer. I'm so grateful to be back and be part of devotions and worship services with you all, and can't wait to hear how these devotions go for you too.

Today is not only special because it's our first Wednesday Word devotion, but also because it is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, today! Happy Earth Day everyone! What an absolutely gorgeous day we have today to celebrate and honor God's creation. Today's devotion will be centered on a theme of creation, and being grateful and loving stewards of this beautiful earth, created by our loving God.

So let us begin our time together in a word of prayer:

God of the universe, your first covenant of mercy was with every living creature. When your beloved Son came among us, the waters of the river welcomed him, the heavens opened up to greet his arrival, the animals of the wilderness drew near as his companions. With all the world's people, may we who are washed into new life through baptism seek the way of your new creation, the way of justice and care, mercy and peace, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen.

Our Scripture for today comes from Job, chapter 12, verses 7-10:

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.*

While the story of Job is one that is quite emotionally challenging for us to study, I think this time of pandemic is a great opportunity to find spiritual strength in Job's story. Job had an incredibly difficult time in his life. He lost his entire family, his wife and kids all died, and all his wealth was taken away from him. On top of all that loss, he then became gravely ill, almost to the point of

dying. He argued with his friends, he argued with God, and he had to find strength to carry on in the midst of all his suffering. The strength he found, was from God. He had every right to be angry with God and argue with God, but he always had faith. Job could not understand why this suffering had befallen him, but he still had faith in the God who is in and amongst all things, even our deepest hurts and moments of suffering.

Many of us are hitting moments of deep hurt and suffering in our lives these days. Many of us, our families, and our loved ones have lost jobs, been furloughed, lost wealth in the economic crash, and are full of other fears. Fear for our health and well-being, especially if we are immuno-compromised. Fear for our healthcare workers who are exposed to the novel coronavirus every day, and we fear for their health and the capacity of our system to adequately treat everyone. Fear that we may never get to experience certain milestones in our life, like graduations, sports seasons, prom, weddings, baby showers, and other celebrations. We fear for our businesses, our colleagues, our schools. And we fear that we are going to continue to lose things in our lives for an unforeseeable amount of time.

One of the most powerful things about reading Job, especially in this season, is that we have language and permission to be angry and frustrated with God. It's okay to be frustrated sometimes and question why things are happening to you. But the key part of this arguing and frustration with God is that we know God is still present with us. It's like any fight you have with someone you love - they are still there, you're not about to give up on them, and you have a right to be frustrated and advocate for yourself and what's happening with you. So much of Job's arguing with God is rooted in courtroom language, meant to defend himself and advocate for himself. But ultimately God is there, God listens, God is present, and God provides.

The verses we read from Job today are in the midst of Job's intense suffering. He is at a point of blaming himself for his misfortune, which is not uncommon in folks experiencing mental health struggles or grief of any kind. Of course Job is grieving the loss of his family, his wealth, and his health. But in the midst of all his grieving, Job names what is present and true around him - creation, and God's creative power. Who among all of creation does not know the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

No matter where we are in terms of our feelings, our mental health, our physical health, or spiritual journey, we can truly always rely on God being present. God has created all things and all people, and is very present in and among them. Even when we are struggling, in the depths of the pit in our lives, there is still truth, beauty, and creative power around us that has come from God. God does not ignore us in our suffering and in our grieving, God is with us in the pit and will be with us as we journey upward and out of it. Even in these extremely difficult times of pandemic, uncertainty, and fear, we have the gifts of God and God's creation on which we can tangibly rely. Look at this gorgeous day around us - the sun is shining, warming us all from the outside in. The grass is green and the first shoots of new life are rising forth from the ground. The sky is an incredible blue, being made cleaner with fewer vehicles burning gas into the

atmosphere these days. And we have a gentle, beautiful breeze, a reminder of the Holy Spirit, the breath in each of us, the breath of creation we find in the wind.

We can both appreciate the beauty of creation and be in a place of struggle in our lives at the same time. God is big and powerful and strong enough to hold all the of the things you carry in your hearts and minds. God is with us in all things, all times, all places, all feelings, and all creation. And we give thanks to our powerful God of creation, who is reliable, present, and among us no matter where our journeys may lead.

The spiritual practice I would love for you all to try out today, and for the next few days as you feel so called, is the five senses practice. It's a practice you can certainly do alone, or it's a great practice to try with the whole family as they learn the five sense. This practice helps to ground us in the present moment, no matter what we are feeling (especially in times of anxiety, grief, depression, or any other difficult feelings). We can rely on God's presence in every moment, and being able to name what is tangibly around us in any moment helps us praise God and creation for its healing power.

So I would love for you to head outside - on a walk, a hike, a little jaunt around the block with your dog and/or kids, or just step outside for a moment as you're able. As you step outside, take a deep breath. Look around you, what is happening and present in the creation around you. And as you observe the creation in which you are a part, go through each of your five senses and take a moment to really feel what's happening in each of them. What does the created world look like around you? What smells are hitting you? How do they make you feel? What does the fresh air, breeze, or sunshine feel like? And so on, with sounds and even taste too.

And as you observe these senses, you can certainly write them down and make a list of what the world felt like for you today, in this time and place. But above all, the grounding question - how do you feel God in each of your senses? Where is God present in your physical experience of creation?

This practice is a way to give thanks to God for all the Earth provides for us, all that creation provides for us - our home, our food, our water, all the things needed to create and sustain the abundant life we find in Christ Jesus.

I'd certainly love to hear any insights you have from this practice as you feel called to share. I know I will certainly enjoy a walk later today and give thanks to God for the beauty of creation which we are blessed by. Truly God provides for all of us.

As we close today, let us join together and pray the words our Lord Jesus taught us in the 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 this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Thank you so much for tuning in today! May the peace of Christ be with you all. Amen.