

April 15

*'Father, forgive them;
for they do not know what they are doing.'*

Forgive Me

For I have no clue what I am doing.
Was the crowd yelling loud?
Did you hear my voice join the cry?

For I have no clue what I am talking about.
Was the noise both shaming and blaming?
Did I not stand up for you when the complaints began?

For I have no clue what I am doing.
I thought it would be easier to just agree,
hardly noticed how unkind it was.
Wasn't I just going with the flow?

For I have no clue what I am talking about.
I let the words leave me mouth unchecked,
longing to avoid an argument.
Was I meant to come to your defense?

-Lauren Alexandro

April 20 – Holy Saturday

'It is finished.'

For the Roman rulers, “it” is the cross, the ultimate tool of humiliation. “It” is the message that the cross sends about who has power and who doesn’t. “It” is what keeps the peace. “It” is what keeps the people in line. “It” is what makes the world go ‘round. The wheels of justice turn, and some people get crushed beneath, but that’s just the way things are, says the brokers of all that “it” represents.

For Jesus, “it” is something entirely different. Something much larger, deeper, truer. “It” is the kingdom of heaven. “It” is the righteousness of God. “It” is the promise of salvation. “It” is the hope borne of a steadfast love that endures forever. “It” is God’s work of creation and healing, God’s spirit that binds up the broken-hearted and raises up those who are crushed beneath the wheels of so-called progress.

God’s work is finished on the cross. Finished, as in complete. Finished, as in sealed. Finished, as in the artistic flourish at the end of an elegant film: *finis*.

The Artist transforms a blunt instrument of Rome into a brush with which he paints his greatest masterpiece. It is perfect. It will be made perfect in love. Let the paint dry until the third day. Then, even the Mona Lisa will bow down.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 21 – Easter Sunday

'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'

He has done it his whole life. The rest of us rely on many things for security and comfort. Not Jesus. One day a man declared his intention to be a disciple, saying, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Even before the cross, Jesus gives everything over to God. He is not worried about tomorrow, even though he knows that the cross looms on the horizon, because he trusts that the cross is not the end of his journey. His future leads to God. His life, just as it came from God, leads to God. So it is with us, even though our fears may prevent us from seeing this truth in its fullness and beauty.

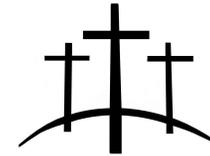
This is Jesus' last word from the cross. Strange to find ourselves back at the cross on the day when we're supposed to be walking in the garden with the risen Christ. And yet, I wonder if these words might have special meaning when we hear them again on the other side of Easter. It is a reminder of the deep faith and hope in which Jesus lived his life to the very end. A reminder that what may have sounded like a cry of desperation was really a declaration of trust. Jesus knew that the Father would not only receive his spirit but raise it up. And God did much more than that.

Reading these words with Easter in mind, I am reminded of God's embracing and enfolding goodness in my life. I am reminded that after the joyful anthems stop ringing, and in the quieter moments that come as the sun descends on our celebrations, I can confidently and peacefully pray this same prayer that Jesus speaks with his last earthly breath. No one is safer than the one in God's care. Thanks be to God.

-Jonathan Hauze

Blessed

Daily Devotions for Lent
2019



Holy Week
April 15-21

St. Paul's United Church of Christ
Exton, Pennsylvania
www.saintpaulsucc.net

April 19 – Good Friday

'I am thirsty.'

In the desert lands of the Near East, where fresh water was and is a precious resource, the promise of salvation was often associated with water. The nearness of God was like the closeness to a well, where one could receive the gift of water so essential to life. The prophet Isaiah gave God's people one of their most enduring images of hope when he promised that the day would come when the people would "with joy draw water from the wells of salvation."

For his followers, Jesus himself became this well of salvation. He said, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and the one who believes in me drink.' And, 'those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

How strange and disturbing to hear the well of salvation declare that he is thirsty! At first, it seems that the cruelty of the cross has accomplished its task. What better way to defeat a besieged people than to cut off their access to food and water? Surely this will be the end of the Jesus movement and back to business for all the powers that be.

They do not realize that there is another power at work on the cross—a greater power, a deeper power, an older power. Human wisdom cannot perceive it, because it is revealed only through renunciation, in the very emptiness that we associate with death and defeat and powerlessness. Jesus is thirsty not because there is no more water but because he is pouring himself out. Now the waters will flow into the hearts of the people. Now, when the power of God's love has done its work, the people will no longer need to draw water from a well—they will have springs of water within their own hearts.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 16

'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

There is a world of meaning in this "today." Even when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven as a present reality, he expressed its promises in the future tense. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth . . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." He blessed people with the promise of what would come to them when everything was fulfilled, when God came to reconcile all things to himself.

Now, on the cross, the hour of fulfillment has come. The pain of the present is joined with the hope of the future in these words of promise. Hope is now immediate. Salvation is now at hand. For generations the people have cried with the psalmist, "How long, O Lord?" This is the answer. Not long now, my children. This very day your suffering will come to an end.

On the cross, valleys are lifted up, mountains are brought low, and distant horizons draw suddenly near. On the cross, the power of God will be revealed in the powerless one. The powers that be would have him cast into perdition or purgatory. God will raise him up to Paradise. There, as he promised, he will draw all people to himself.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 17

*'Woman, here is your son.'
Then he said to the disciple,
'Here is your mother.'*

For some thirty years, Jesus has belonged as much to Mary as to God. That's not a theological claim so much as it's a guess about Mary's motherly claim on her son. I don't care if a celestial being tells me that my daughter is going to become Captain Marvel and save the entire universe from the evil Thanos (that's Greek for "death," by the way). She's still going to be my daughter. And I can tell you unapologetically that there's nothing in heaven or earth that will make me renounce that claim.

Jesus said some things that must have been challenging for her, assuming that she got wind of them. Such as when a member of the crowd called out, "blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you!" and Jesus responded by saying, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Rather? Really? Ouch.

But here she is, at the foot of the cross, still there when all of Jesus' closest friends have deserted him. The angel told her there would be a throne. The angel told her that he would rule forever. This cross was not part of the plan. But she will not abandon her son.

And he will not abandon her. This word from the cross, which is not just for Mary but for all people who stand in the shadows of utter loss, is an act of blessing for those whose love has brought them only pain. Love one another. Like a mother loves her son. Like a son loves his mother. Like God loves us all. When we love with such devotion, Christ is ours, and we are his, even to the end of the age.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 18

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

There have been times in my life when I have felt as if God has completely forgotten me. I think many of us can say that – whether due to illness, the loss of a loved one, bullying at school, losing a home, or any number of circumstances. When I volunteer on Crisis Text Line (741741 – available 24/7, tell your friends) I talk to all sorts of people who feel they have been forgotten, sometimes so much that they see no reason to continue living.

Still, the act of reaching out for help – however someone does – shows at least a small amount of faith that it's possible for life to get better, even if one is in the depths of despair. If there really were no hope for life to improve, there would be no point in praying, or texting a stranger, or pushing through exhaustion to get through another day. Even if it takes a lot of effort to convince ourselves, the truth is that God has not forsaken us even if it feels like that is the case.

-Becky VanderMeulen