

April 1

*'Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.'*

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The Lion's Breath

by Lauren Alexandro

Let us see clearly now,
but a powerful roar is heard and
we hide our eyes
and cover up our ears.
Hiding out of sight.
A willing sacrifice comes
and
there is a lion in the tall grass.
Our hearts beat wild and fast.
This is where we are set free.
Escape the fierce claws and pray for peace.

Escape the fierce claws and pray for peace.
This is where we are set free.
Our hearts beat wild and fast.
There is a lion in the tall grass
and
a willing sacrifice comes
hiding out of sight.
And cover up our ears.
We hide our eyes,
but a powerful roar is heard and
let us see clearly now.

April 6

*'Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.'*

This is a tough one. Even for those who may think of themselves as peaceable people. Jesus did not say, "blessed are the conflict-avoidant" or "blessed are the passive-aggressive." The peace of Christ is not about the absence of conflict, but about the presence of God in the midst of it.

What does this presence look like? The truth is scandalous and offensive to human understanding. Bonhoeffer writes that Jesus' disciples "renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods . . . His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering rather than inflict it on others . . . They renounce all self-assertion, and quietly suffer in the face of hatred and wrong. In so doing they overcome evil with good, and establish the peace of God in the midst of a world of war and hate."

We protest that this is impossible, and that Jesus must have meant something else, but the pacifist legacy of the church for the first three centuries of its existence stands as a witness against us. What shall we do? Is there any option besides either despairing over our sin or justifying our violent ways? We could renounce all violence and self-assertion, but chances are good that our renunciation wouldn't make it through the day.

Alas, I don't have any answers, except that there is one before whom we can lay all our burdens down. He is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. He is our peace even when we fail to make peace. And you know what? He's not done with us yet.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 7

*'Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.'*

One of my favorite TV shows is an old Aaron Sorkin sitcom called "SportsNight." My favorite character on the show is Dan, a goofy guy with a big heart. In one episode, when he is trying to woo a woman who has been wronged by another man, he declares his integrity, "for I am Dan, doer of good things were women are concerned."

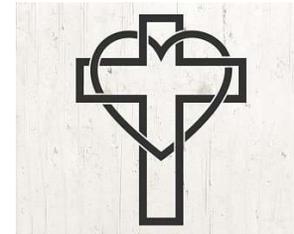
We don't often use the word "doer." It looks like a spelling mistake. It sounds weird. But I would kind of like it if the word for "peacemaker" was translated as "peacedoer," despite the jagged red line that my word processor placed under the word as soon as I typed it. It works with the original Greek. And it seems to place more focus on the deeds that we do rather than the results we achieve. Often in life, even when we do strive to make peace, it doesn't happen. Peace involves relationship, and we can only be responsible for our own end of things. Will we still be blessed, even if we fail to make it happen? If in spite of our best efforts we are left with the pain of estrangement, the wound of a broken relationship?

Now I realize that we don't always give it our best effort. Sometimes we're too stubborn, sometimes we're too hurt. But what about those other times? St. Paul has a surprisingly reasonable and measured piece of advice: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." There's room there for failure. And lots of room for grace. Whenever you can, be a doer of good things were others are concerned. And cast all your cares upon him who is your peace. He will give you rest. He will bless you.

-Jonathan Hauze

Blessed

Daily Devotions for Lent
2019



Lent 5
April 1-7

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

April 5

*'Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.'*

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Daughters

by Lauren Alexandro

Oh daughters come and see what lies before us.
Peace has come to the door.

She longs to play in the small green space you call 'the middle.'
Peace is dancing and singing and throwing the ball high.

Oh daughters come and play and sing and dance.
Love is standing on the back patio.

She has chalk and sticks and is already making mud pies.
Love has made a game for everyone to play.

Oh daughters come and make your offering.
Peace and Love will guide you.

They have called their sister, Wisdom, and now the trio will
explore together.
Go off, dear daughters, you know the green space and the patio
is colorful with chalk.

Your hearts are tender. You are the guides.
Peace, Love, and Wisdom skip along behind you.

Oh daughters, play with Peace. Glad is her heart.
Oh daughters, dance with Love. Warm are her hands.
Oh daughters, sing with Wisdom. Gentle are her words.

April 2

*'Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.'*

In 'The Problem of Pain,' C.S. Lewis writes that "It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to."

He may be overstating it. When speaking of God's ways, the word 'only' seems like a risky choice. God has a funny way of surprising us.

Think about Moses: he was a murderer on the lam when God appeared to him in the burning bush. Did Moses want to see God at that moment? I'm guessing he didn't.

Consider Isaiah: he was "lost . . . a man of unclean lips" when God called him to be a prophet. His first words upon seeing God were not "Glory, Hallelujah!" but "Woe is me!"

And what about the twelve disciples? Reading about their selfish bickering throughout the gospel stories, purity of heart is not the first thing that comes to mind. And yet they walked with the Word made flesh.

It may be safe to tell the pure in heart that they will see God, but to riff on something else that C.S. Lewis wrote, from 'The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,' God is not 'safe' – but God is good. And God's goodness has a way of appearing just as vividly to people who can't seem to get it right. Grace goes where it will. And when it bursts in, before we even have a chance to cry woe, God says, "I love you." Full of surprises, that One.

-Jonathan Hauze

April 3

*'Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.'*

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Lion Hearted Small Squeak

by Lauren Alexandro

Tiny paws lift heavenward.
Gentle roaring and soft snoring.
Little one, no harm to come.
Fur-ball, fluff-ball, all God's creatures.

Bright eyes look up.
Fist lift high and loud the cry.
Bold one, no help to come.
Lover, fighter, all God's features.

April 4

*'Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.'*

The Bible speaks of people purifying themselves, such as when worshipers travel to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to make an offering. But they are not really doing this alone. They would have to go to the Temple and see a priest, who would offer a sacrifice on their behalf. If you told someone to “purify yourself” but gave them no access to a priest, you might as well be telling them to dance a tango by themselves.

Even Jesus, who offended people by challenging conventional notions of purity and impurity, respected the rites of purification. When he meets the ten lepers near Samaria, for example, he instructs them to “show yourselves to the priests.” As soon as they obey, they are healed.

What about today? We no longer think about our lives in terms of ritual purity. If you came to your pastor and said, “make me pure,” you would probably be met with a stupefied look and some stammered words . . . “Ah, um, you’ve got the wrong guy.”

Christ is the one we’re looking for. Our hope is in him. Even when we are filled with darkness, his light makes us worthy to stand before God and ask for a blessing, trusting that God will not fail to give it.

And tomorrow? That’s another part of what it means to hope in Christ. We believe that the day will come when we will be pure, as he is pure. “At present we are on the outside” writes C.S. Lewis. “We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so.”

-Jonathan Hauze