

March 11

*'Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.'*

In Act IV of *Macbeth*, when Macduff learns from a reluctant messenger that his family has been slain by agents of Macbeth, he is stricken speechless. His companion Malcolm finds the silence too much to bear, and pleads with Macduff to say something, anything:

“Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o’er-fraught heart, and bids it break.”

It’s true. And that’s not the half of it. When the heart is filled with grief, it can feel like a black hole, a negative spiritual field so strong that no light can escape from it. The ancient Greeks sometimes described sorrow as a ‘contracted heart,’ a powerful metaphor for that sense that the heart does more than just break—it collapses in upon itself.

But God has given us a powerful gift to bring light into the loneliest and most distant black holes of our grief: we can mourn. When we mourn, we give sorrow words. We create a bridge with our words – which may not be words at all but just sighs or moans – so that our friends can cross over to us. And when they come, they come bearing love and light. When they come, they come with words – which also may be no more than sighs and moans – that remind us of the Word no darkness can overcome, the Word more powerful than death itself. When they come, it is as though the Lord himself is standing at the door to the tomb, saying, “Lazarus, come out!” And he comes.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 16

*'Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.'*

This was my second year coaching my son Charlie’s grade basketball team. It was a hoot. Also an exercise in humility. The sports league is an intentional ministry, so in addition to basketball skills the coaches are also responsible for teaching Christian virtues. For the last fifteen minutes of every practice, we talked about honor, endurance, faith, and love. When I say ‘talked,’ I use that word loosely. I tried to talk, but the boys were usually too busy hiding under the tables, quoting Geico commercials, and figuring out ways to squirt their water bottles at each other without me noticing. I always noticed, but pick your battles, right?

Not a big deal, because I believe that the real lessons that they will take away are the ones that I modeled for them on the court. The best way to learn a virtue is to have an example to follow. With me so far?

Fast forward to the end of the season. I’m excited, because it’s our last game. The boys are playing great, holding their own against a tough team. In the second half, one of the referees starts tightening everything up at the end of the court where my boys are trying to score. For the first time all season, the whistle blows for double-dribbles, traveling, close out-of-bounds plays. One time, the whistle blows just as I’m praising one of my boys for what I thought was a great play. And I almost, almost let my emotions get the better of me. I had to turn around and stop myself from saying something to the ref. Close call, in more ways than one.

Being meek may not win ball games. But outside the lines, it wins you the kingdom. That’s a lesson we could all use a little more of.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 17

*'Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.'*

Of all the Christian virtues, meekness is probably the most maligned and misunderstood. We write it off before we even learn what it means, because we associate it with weakness, and nobody wants to be weak. We fear it because it sounds like we're supposed to become submissive, refusing to stand up for ourselves. It offends our revolutionary sensibilities, our sense of liberty and human dignity.

I wish I could explain these problems away, but the fact is that I struggle with them. Jesus says, 'turn the other cheek,' and 'do not resist an evildoer,' and he goes to the cross rather than fight the charges against him. The passion story is the ultimate example of meekness. And I wish Jesus had said, 'don't worry, guys, this part doesn't apply to you.' but we have to reckon with the fact that instead he told his disciples, 'if you want to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me.' Do I still even count as a disciple? Forget about picking up my cross—I think I misplaced mine altogether.

But I am not ready to give up on this beatitude. Here's something that helps. I learned recently that the Greek word translated "meek" was also used to describe horses that had been well-trained to respond to their rider's every movement, horses whose mildness of spirit made them the perfect steeds for dangerous situations. Such horses are not submissive to other mounts, or inexperienced riders. And they don't work for themselves. They await their master's guidance, and they go where he leads. That sounds okay to me.

-Jonathan Hauze

Blessed

Daily Devotions for Lent
2019



Lent 2
March 11-17

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

March 15

*'Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.'*

We live in a culture that is terribly uncomfortable with grief. We spend so much of our time distracting ourselves from our mortality that we don't know what to do with it walks through the door. There was once a time when people were given the grace of time and understanding. Now, if you aren't back to 'normal' within a week or so, people treat you like you're radioactive. "Why can't he get over it?" "Why does she cry so much?"

I don't think people are necessarily trying to be mean. Perhaps they are just not trying hard enough to understand. In a recent sermon, Pope Francis said that indifference, just as much as hatred, is the opposite to love. To judge someone for their grief may not be an act of hatred; it may simply be our own discomfort leading us to turn away from something that offends or frightens us.

But Christians are called to act differently. We who worship a crucified Lord, a Lord who suffered and died so that we might live, have a special duty to turn toward those who are grieving with the compassion of Christ himself. To be a Christian is to be, to borrow a phrase from Robert Frost, "one acquainted with the night." We need not be afraid to go there, for Christ has gone ahead of us, carrying the torchlight of God's love there. It shines in our companionship, our willingness to listen, our patience. Christ shines in our love.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 12

*'Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.'*

This devotion in memory of my most wonderful grandmother, Mary Rebecca Crossley, March 14, 1893 – April 27, 1984.

On my last birthday my age moved into a new decade. In the past, when that decade jump has happened, I've been too busy to really do any more than give it the cursory "wow" and then move on to the next task at hand. At 10, just thrilled to be in double digits! At 20, I was an undergrad and thinking about grad school and career. At 30, I was married, a working professional, and a new mother. At 40, a new job in a fast-moving tech company and 3(!) growing, active kids. At 50, another new job, helping my kids with college and my parents with growing older. Now here I am at 60, looking back and looking forward.

My father used to say, "This getting old is for the birds." And I have to admit he had a point. There are the regular aches and pains, but I think that one of the most difficult parts of aging is that so many of my friends and family have made their way to the pearly gates and I miss them.

With each loss there does eventually come a time after the tears to remember each person with joy. I count my blessings that there are so many stories to tell that make me smile and laugh out loud. I count my blessings that when I sit down to my favorite foods, I can remember enjoying meals made with these same recipes. I count my blessings to have had so many to love and to have been loved in return.

-Nancy Greger

March 13

*'Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.'*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a special understanding of this teaching. He believed that in speaking of “mourning” Jesus was talking about a leaving behind of what the world calls peace and prosperity:

“He [Jesus] means refusing to be in tune with the world or to accommodate oneself to its standards. Such men mourn for the world, for its guilt, its fate and its fortune. While the world keeps holiday they stand aside, and while the world sings, “Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,” they mourn. They see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink. The world dreams of progress, of power and of the future, but the disciples meditate on the end, the last judgment, and the coming of the kingdom. To such heights the world cannot rise. And so the disciples are strangers in the world, unwelcome guests and disturbers of the peace. No wonder the world rejects them!”

Jesus once highlighted this contrast between the world and the kingdom, comparing the present generation (his culture) with children, calling out to those who refuse to play along with their games, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.” When the world goes after money and power, but we refuse to rejoice in the Dow Jones high or the newest military hardware, caring instead for souls and the strength of our love and mercy, we are on our way to discipleship.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 14

*'Blessed are those who mourn,
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Pass the Comfort

he said to me, "I don't believe that without the bad times we can't enjoy the good."

Lows don't make the highs higher. That's not how this works.

i said to him, "We don't get a pass to skip out on pain, we get to believe it will be better."

High don't make the lows lower. That's not what we've signed up for.

we said to each other, "Are we keeping score? Could we never cry? Could we never laugh?"

Lows and highs, highs and lows. They are part of living.

we read, "Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low."

Shall we check if Christ is coming or going?

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-Lauren Alexandro