

The season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday and continues until Easter, is inspired by Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. It is a time to turn toward the loving presence of God and rededicate ourselves to the renunciation of the well-worn paths that diverge from the merciful, compassionate, and peaceable way of Christ.

This Lent we reflect on the Beatitudes, Jesus' blessings found at Matthew 5:2-10. We will spend a few days reflecting on each of the Beatitudes, going deep into the promises of divine blessing that turn our world upside-down.

-Pastor Jonathan

March 10

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that when Jesus taught his disciples about the "poor in spirit," they knew that he was talking to them:

"He has called them, every one, and they have renounced everything at his call. Now they are living in want and privation, the poorest of the poor, the sorest afflicted, and the hungriest of the hungry. They have only him, and with him they have nothing, literally nothing in the world, but everything with and through God."

Reading this, I wonder if our affluence may be an affliction rather than an asset. We tell ourselves to "make all you can, save all you can, and give all that you can," but it was John Wesley not Jesus who said that. Jesus said, "Sell all that own and give the money to the poor; then come, follow me." We may not obey, but we still have to reckon with the fact that he said it.

Our wealth does come with a cost. Our reliance on it has a way of seeping into our spiritual life, making us think that we need something other than God in order to be disciples. How many times have we complained that the church doesn't have enough resources? I know as well as anyone that it's good to have enough money to keep the pastor fed, but that's not the mission to which Christ calls us. To be a disciple is to bring people into the presence of God. No thing we possess will enable us to do that. But with and through God, we will always have a treasure to share. It is our only treasure, and it is more than enough.

-Jonathan Hauze

Blessed

Daily Devotions for Lent
2019



Lent 1
Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit
March 6-10

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

March 9

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'*

Each of the Gospels has a unique way of telling the story of Jesus' trial. The most striking thing about Mark's version is the utter silence of Jesus when he is accused of "many things." He says only two words (three words in the English translation), but they barely count as an answer, much less as a defense. Pilate wants to know if he is truly the King of the Jews. Jesus replies, "you say so," and then he stops talking entirely, refusing to respond to any of the charges that have been brought against him.

Can you imagine doing this yourself? Knowing that you are being accused unjustly, but refusing to speak in your own defense? It is a scandalous thought, not just absurd but downright offensive to any human being with an ego. But that's just the thing. The self must be defended. Jesus shows us what it means to die to self so that we may live for God alone.

To keep silence in the face of an accusation is perhaps the ultimate test of humility, because it requires us to think little enough of ourselves that we do not care what other people think. Teresa of Avila counsels this practice as a way to remember whose judgment really matters: "What does it matter to us if we are blamed by them all, provided we are without blame in the sight of the Lord?"

Here's a Lenten challenge: the next time someone says (or implies) that something is your fault, bite your tongue and think about Jesus. Remember that when others are harsh with you there is One who is gentle and humble in heart. He will give you rest. He will set you free.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 6 – Ash Wednesday

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'*

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It shouldn't be so hard. Every day brings reminders, at least for those of a certain age. Your back hurts. Your doctor tells you that you have arthritis. You look at the spring training roster for the Boston Red Sox and realize you are now older than the grizzled veterans. Older even than the manager. One begins to understand – and feel – the meaning of an old hymn lyric:

*Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.*

Spring is coming, yes, and so is baseball (hallelujah!), but today we wear ashes to remember what we are: mortal. Even the immortals among us are not immortal. Babe Ruth has been dead for more than seventy years. He may be remembered as long as baseball endures, but what about us? There aren't record books or halls of fame for the things that most of us do with our lives.

In time we are forgotten, our stories swept away like dust in the wind. But we do not worship time. We worship one who remembers in compassion those who lie in ashes and dust. All that time takes, though it may seem like everything, cannot be compared with the treasure that God gives. It is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. And so the ashes we wear today are not a deathly sign but the mark of a living hope, an enduring promise, a tender blessing.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 7

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'*

After giving a talk about her journey to becoming a Buddhist nun, she is asked how much time she spends meditating each day. "Not as much as I would like," she says. Her answer gives me a sense of relief, since I often feel the same way. The word I would use to describe my own prayer life? Impoverished.

"When I am teaching regularly," she says, "I am just too busy to meditate as much as I should." Just like me, I think. Then she continues, "on those days, I probably only meditate about two or three hours." Okay. My goodness. Not so much like me.

Now I realize that the spiritual life is not a competitive sport. But two to three hours? I'm not in her league. I may not even be on the same planet. I could get discouraged by such a realization, but instead it dawns on me: she doesn't feel rich in spirit either. Maybe, no matter how much you pray, the heart always desires more. Because who can say that they have spent enough time in the presence of God? Probably you could go into the desert and ask the same question of a hermit who, when he not attending to the physical necessities of life, spends every waking moment in prayer, and he would say the same thing: "not as much as I would like."

The desire's the thing. It's the hunger, the poverty of spirit that keeps us coming back to God, whether for two minutes or two hours, to receive the only real riches we will ever have, or ever need.

-Jonathan Hauze

March 8

*'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
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"Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"

by Lauren Alexandro

Poverty will hold our hand before we cross the street.
We will have nothing but enough to share.

Humility will book a room in every hotel around.
We will come apart and complete one another.

Pride will find our doors locked and cold.
We will light a fire and warm our heaven.

Hope will become our porch light.
We will find the way home in the dark.

Joy will be its moth.
We will join in the dance.

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