
Heavenly showers

All God's blessings go together, like links in a golden chain. If he gives converting grace, he will also give comforting grace. He will send "showers of blessing." Look up today, O parched plant, and open thy leaves and flowers for a heavenly watering.

—Charles H. Spurgeon



[image above: RAIN_13777, RAIN_13777C]

Fools for Christ

April Fools' Day isn't a religious holiday, though it may date to Pope Gregory XIII and his new calendar. In 1582, he shifted New Year's Day from April to January, and people who didn't believe the change were called April fools.

April Fools' Day may also be connected to the lightheartedness that comes with warmer weather, as well as to medieval Christian festivals that involved pranks, disguises and a temporarily inverted social order.

Yet, in Scripture, such reversal characterizes the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, St. Paul writes that the gospel seems foolish to people who don't know Christ, that God uses the "foolishness of our proclamation" to offer salvation to all and that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. Jesus "foolishly" inverted the social order, saying the last will be first and the first, last.

So if on April 1 — and every day — we live as "fools for Christ," we're precisely what he calls us to be!

Healing and community

In [the] healing texts, Jesus does not just cure people's diseases and cast out their demons and then say, "Mission accomplished." He's always after something more than that because the healing is never fully accomplished until there is a restoration to community. People are healed of disease, and then he tells the folks just standing around watching to go get them something to eat. The widow's son is raised from the dead and then [Jesus] gives him back to his mother. And ... the man healed of demons is then told to stay with his people and speak of what God has done. In the Jesus business, community is always a part of healing. Even though community is never perfect.

—Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*

Special date

- Administrative Professionals Day, April 27, 2016

Preparation for worship

On this second Sunday of the Easter season, help me continue to notice signs of resurrection, Lord!



In the spirit of springtime, we focus on the new life God causes to sprout — in the world and church, in lives and hearts.



I am your lamb; you are my Good Shepherd. But you're also the Lamb sacrificed in my place, Lord Jesus. Help me grasp this profound mystery!



"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1, NIV). I thank you, God, for the abundant gifts of your Creation.

Words of welcome

Welcome as we continue to celebrate Easter — not just a day but a season. Alleluia!



As we gather, we pray, "Holy God, receive our worship, offered to the glory of your name. Amen."



Brothers and sisters in the risen Christ, grace and peace to you! Please greet one another as we prepare to worship God.



We worship in the name of our creative God, our all-loving Savior and the rejuvenating Spirit. Amen.

- "The greatest gift we can give back to our great God is to let his love make us glad."
—Ann Voskamp, *The Greatest Gift*
- "The devil knows your name but calls you by your sin. God knows your sin but calls you by your name."
—Ricardo Sanchez
- "Wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar."
—William Wordsworth
- "Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to my sunset sky."
—Rabindranath Tagore
- "If we are not planted in Christ, we'll be uprooted in crisis."
—Unknown

Evangelism tip

We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

—Madeleine L'Engle



[image above: CANDLE_13776, CANDLE_13776C]

Find rest

I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are wise and very beautiful; but I have never read in either of them: Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.

—St. Augustine

“His Glory”

God sends rainbows after showers
arching 'cross the freshened skies.
Every rainbow shows God's glory.
Every wonder tells his story.

God sends Jesus down from heaven
offering mercy, hope and life.
On the cross he showed God's glory.
Every blessing tells his story.

God sends me forth into this world
sharing love that offers life.
And I hope to show God's glory
In the way I tell his story.

—MaryAnn Sundby

A love explosion

“Mommy, if Jesus comes to live inside my heart, will I explode?” One of missionary Katie Davis' adopted daughters surprised her with that question as they headed to the Nile River for some baptisms.

Although Davis immediately replied, “No!” she later realized: “That is exactly what we should do if Jesus comes to live inside our hearts. We will explode with love, with compassion, with hurt for those who are hurting, and with joy for those who rejoice. We will explode with a desire to be more, to be better, to be close to the One who made us.”

—adapted from *Kisses From Katie*

Avoiding temptation

Our 10-year-old loves playing on his father's tablet but may use only the touchscreen because he's misused the keyboard and stylus. One day, after receiving permission to play, he detached and handed over the forbidden objects. His dad said, “Just leave them there,” but our son replied, “No, I might be tempted to use them.”

We routinely pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” hoping God will almost magically keep us out of trouble even as we stray close to enticements: We buy high-calorie treats while intending to “eat healthy.” We visit big-box stores and spend money we don't have. We gather with gossipy friends, fully aware that such talk is sinful and harmful.

Perhaps we should be more proactive about removing temptations. Perhaps “Lead me not into temptation” means “God, help me keep *myself* away from that which tempts me toward poor choices.” Amen!

—Heidi Mann

A shepherd's role

While traveling in Iran, writer Eric Bishop asked a villager about an earthen enclosure topped with dry thorns. The man said sheep stayed in the round space at night for safety. “What are the thorns for?” Bishop asked. “If a wolf tries to break in and attack the sheep,” the man replied, “he'll knock against the thorns, and they'll make a noise, and the shepherd will wake up and drive off the wolf.”

Pointing out the enclosure's doorless entrance, Bishop asked why a wolf wouldn't just enter there. Because, replied the villager, “that's where the shepherd sleeps; the shepherd is the door.”

Suddenly Bishop understood why in John 10 Jesus calls himself first the door, or gate, for the sheep and then the Good Shepherd. Because Jesus is the shepherd, he's also the door that keeps us, his sheep, safe within his care.

Staying sharp

The English word *character* comes from Greek for a sharp-pointed instrument. Much of this original meaning is implied in the word as we use it, for isn't character the means by which we make an impression on the world? To be sure, the instrument itself is not a finished product [but] a mere tool; but, like many a fine instrument, character improves with use. Our actions and reactions temper the blade and make the edge powerful or impotent. We each must forge our own character, be responsible for keeping it in condition and be responsible for its results.

—Author unknown

In his hands

John G. Paton (1824-1907) was a pioneer missionary to the South Pacific islands now known as Vanuatu. Previous evangelists to the area had been consumed by cannibals, but Paton was undeterred — even after his wife and newborn son soon died of tropical fever.

Paton clung closely to Jesus amid deprivation, animosity and many attempts on his life. “I knew not, for one brief hour, when or how attack might be made,” he wrote. “And yet, with my trembling hand clasped in the hand once nailed on Calvary, and now swaying the scepter of the universe, calmness and peace and resignation abode in my soul.”

Today about 85 percent of Vanuatu’s population is Christian.

Treasures

One by one he took them from me,
all the things I valued most,
until I was empty-handed;
every glittering toy was lost.

And I walked earth’s highways, grieving
in my rags and poverty
till I heard his voice inviting,
“Lift your empty hands to me!”

So I held my hands toward heaven,
and he filled them with a store
of his own transcendent riches,
till they could contain no more.

And at last I comprehended
with my stupid mind and dull,
that God could not pour his riches
into hands already full!

—Martha Snell Nicholson

Look to Christ

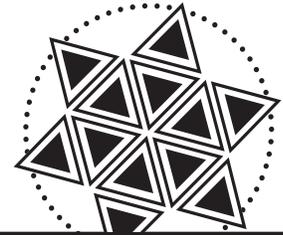
The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One. While he looks at Christ, the very things he has so long been trying to do will be getting done within him.

—A.W. Tozer

Bible Quiz

What was the name of Esther’s cousin who raised her after her parents died?

- A. Hegai
- B. Haman
- C. Mordecai
- D. Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes)



Answer: C (See Esther 2:7.)

[image above: STAR_13778, STAR_13778C]

The best medicine

Although the Bible never refers to Jesus laughing, he clearly had a sense of humor — and needed one to deal with his critics and even his disciples. James Martin, S.J., author of *Between Heaven and Mirth* (HarperOne), writes, “If we accept the idea of [Jesus] as a human being, we must accept all human attributes for him — laughing as well as suffering.”

The ancient church marked the Sunday after Easter with humor and laughter to celebrate Jesus’ triumph over death. Today some congregations designate their post-Easter worship as Hilarity Sunday or Bright Sunday. Faith is serious business, but that doesn’t mean Christians must always be serious!

Fit to be fruitful

I am in Christ: created anew, made a branch of the Vine, fitted for fruit-bearing. Would ... that believers would cease looking at their old nature and complaining of their weakness, as if God called them for what they were unfitted for!

Would that they would believingly and joyfully accept the wondrous revelation of how God, in uniting them to Christ, has made himself chargeable for their spiritual growth and fruitfulness! How all sickly hesitancy and sloth would disappear, and under the influence of this motive — the faith in the faithfulness of him whom they are in Christ — their whole nature would rise to accept and fulfill their glorious destiny!

—Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*