

# *Blessed are ...*

## *the* **PURE** *in* *heart*

LENTEN EVENING PRAYER  
The Rev. Daniel Rhinehart  
MARCH 19, 2020

Readings: Genesis 16, Matthew 5:8

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Daniel, a pastor in the church of Christ, to the people of God at Advent Lutheran Church in Arlington—

Grace and peace be yours from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I had hoped to come and be with you again: I remember the warm welcomes you have given me in past years. In these strange times such memories are all the more dear.

The theme on which I am meditating in this season is the word of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Purity! What a strange word in this time of anxiety, this time of travel bans, this time of sold-out hand sanitizer and toilet paper. What does it mean to be pure in heart, and what does it mean to see God?

The Scriptures are curiously ambivalent about the idea of “seeing God.” The apostle John wrote that “no one has ever seen God.” Moses and Elijah both experience strange visions of God but it is hard to say outright that they see God. The tale of Hagar, alone and pregnant in the desert, is another such story in which God seems to appear to the eyes of a human being.

Hagar is not one that we would normally think of as “pure.” Her story is a strange one to our ears, and uncomfortable: Sarai, past the age of childbearing, tells her husband to go to bed with her slave, so that her slave may bear a child who will then be reckoned as belonging to Sarai. The results of this for the relationship between mistress and slave are predictable: Hagar, becoming pregnant, feels a sense of self-worth that changes her relationship with her mistress. And her mistress does not like it, and mistreats Hagar so severely that she runs away.

And having run away, pregnant and alone in the desert, Hagar sees an angel of the Lord and receives a promise for her future and the future of the child in her womb. She says: “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?”

Martin Luther, in his explanation of Jesus’ teaching, contrasts the false purity of a hermit with many pious, useless works, with the true purity of a citizen or family member who loves and serves the people around them as best they can, following God’s Word in doing so. They then see God in the faces of those whom they are loving and serving. That’s one kind of purity that we can all experience in our everyday lives. I think the story of Hagar, alone and desperate in the desert, shows another kind of purity. In the purity of her need and desperation, her fear for her own life and the life in her womb, she sees God and receives the promises she needs to live on in hope.

We've all been seeing stories from Italy and elsewhere, stories about quarantine, stories about hospitals and healthcare workers being completely overwhelmed. We are now taking part in a massive disruption of our own lives and livelihoods in order to prevent or at least mitigate these things among ourselves. May God shield us from such times. If such times come, when they come, many will see God in the faces of their neighbors whom they serve.

But many of us must serve our neighbors by remaining at home. There is a line from the poet John Milton that I understand was much beloved on the Home Front during the Second World War and may now be comforting to us once again: "They also serve who only stand and wait." God is with us and will remain with us when we are in need, in anxiety, in isolation, even to the very end. My prayer is that all of us be purified in heart so that we too may see God.

*Look, I'm writing this greeting with my own hand!*

*Be of good courage. God is with you.*

*Yours in Christ,  
Daniel*