

War & Peace, Love & Hate – Lauren Speeth

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight Lord, our rock and our redeemer. March is Bible Appreciation Month. And when I think about all my favorite verses, this one from Eccl. surely is on the list somewhere. The whole book of Ecclesiastes is a favorite, when I'm in a particular mood. It basically says: tried this, tried that; been there, done that; been high, been low; it's all too big to understand, so go with the flow and be happy. Of course, there's more, but that's the nutshell. And oh, there's power in that last line: *A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

I like one side of that equation very much... a time of love... a time of peace. But we don't have to look very far to find the other side - war and hate - do we? Just turn on the news, and it's Tolstoy's *War and Peace* unfolding. It's all so... epic. So, Shakespearian. Do you remember the prince's soliloquy at the end of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – as both the lovers lie dead? *"Where be these enemies? Montague, Capulet. See what a scourge is laid upon your hate that heaven finds means to kill your joys, with love.... And I for winking at your discords too have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished."* Epic! Shakespeare speaks to us all... driving that point home. All are punished.

Okay, we're living in epic, punishing times. It can feel overwhelming. We don't control the nations. So, what IS in our power, today? I say there is a great deal, and when we change ourselves, we change the world. Your effect ripples out... I like to say never underestimate your ripple. Because the quality – the essence – that we bring to each day is an active, conscious choice that affects everything around us, and because God's economy is not our economy, we have power. We can seize that power, as we start each day, as we live each day, and as we bring each day to a close.

Starting out our day, we can put on our shoes of peace, actively choosing to work hard to stay grounded in that peace, with God as our helper, whatever arises. We follow the Prince of Peace, and this is what we're called to do. I'm absent minded but have reminders in my bathroom including a framed copy of *The Lorica Prayer*, to start the day right.

Living each day, if we're actually met by hate, we can try to remember Jesus' call to love. In the Gospel of John (15:18-25) Jesus told us *"if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."* But Jesus didn't hate back... not even at the cross. He loved. He healed. He forgave. ... But what do we do if we find ourselves at war - with ourselves or someone else or an event or so on? We can look inside and see what's behind this inner war. If something inside feels like hitting something with a stick, maybe that's fear – something feels like danger. Where fear arises, perfect love can cast it out. Love can be an active conscious choice, something to be practiced and perfected, like peace. Writing this, I realized I have to confess I've got hate against cancer. Cancer has attacked people I care about, and it's killing my dog. I want to hit cancer with a big stick. That's a signal to me that I need to settle more into deeper trust in God's goodness.





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Closing each day, we can take our radical “hit something with a big stick” feelings to God, or our gratitude for getting through with just a smidge more peace and love, knowing we are fully known and fully loved. I know God knows my quirks and faults and loves me no matter whether I get mad at cancer or whatever, and the same with you. Because Jesus promised to walk with us always – even until the end of everything. And to that I say, Amen.



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