

# PERSPECTIVES

*Beneath The Cross*

[www.ascensioncos.org](http://www.ascensioncos.org)



*A Lenten Devotional - Week 1*

*March 5-11, 2017*

*Luke 10:25-42*

An excerpt from Pastor Dan Holt's Ash Wednesday message and what it means to be ***Beneath The Cross***:

*Beneath the Cross* is a place where you look up and realize Jesus is dying here. Death is close and we are from dust to dust. That is our existence. For us to be humble isn't for us to be grueling or something like that. It comes from seeing who we are honestly. Looking at reality. That we're limited. We don't have all gifts and abilities. That we're flawed at times. We make mistakes. We say things we shouldn't say. The hard stuff of life allows us to be open and walk together.

When Jesus did lay his life down on the cross it was this act not of weakness but of great faith. Faith that somehow in the torturous horror of the cross that God was going to hold him. He being up there would be a sign for us of what sacrificial loves look like for us. A sign for us that God would hold us. A sign for us that there is a way through death to life.

And so today we gather if you will, as we will this season *Beneath the Cross*. Beneath the cross of Jesus. It's a place of humility. And so we put that on our foreheads trusting that God will hold us through the worst of everything. The shape of the cross. Even when it comes to our time to return to dust and ashes. God has us, as He has his Son. Amen.

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Through this Lenten season, you are invited to read reflections offered by members and friends of Ascension Lutheran Church. There will be six booklets printed from now until Easter Sunday. Each devotional booklet will focus on engaging Sunday's Scripture readings. Let Sunday be a time when you hear God's Word in worship together of our Lord and Savior. If you miss a Sunday's sermon, we invite you to check-it out at [www.ascensioncos.org](http://www.ascensioncos.org).

It is a gift to be brothers and sisters in Christ, walking together *Beneath The Cross*, in faith in Jesus Christ and we all have *perspectives* to offer one another along the way!

~Mary Stoneback  
Diaconal Minister for Faith Formation

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The Parable of the Good Samaritan

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii,<sup>[b]</sup> gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three,

do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”<sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

### Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup> there is need of only one thing.<sup>[c]</sup> Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

### **Sunday, March 5**

Today Pastor Daniel preached on Luke 10:25-42, which includes the Story of the Good Samaritan and the Story of Mary and Martha. On this first Sunday of Lent, we invite you to spend time in God’s Word. Read through this passage, and consider Pastor Daniel’s reflection on the text. If you missed today’s service, visit [www.ascensioncos.org](http://www.ascensioncos.org) to hear the message.

### **Monday, March 6**

All of us on any given day are both the good Samaritan and the priest or Levite. To greater or lesser extents, on any given day, all of us are the man lying in the ditch and the robbers. Sometimes we are even the inn keepers. In a variety of ways I have spent time

with our confirmation students reflecting on this passage, having them act out the different roles. By having them play out the different roles of this story they begin to see how this story is played out in their day-to-day lives. While with younger people it is a challenge to make sure they learn how to take on the role of the good Samaritan and become more aware of those around them, with adults there is a greater need to see how we are regularly the man lying in the ditch. Each of us, every day, are wounded by others, hurting and not whole. But we are much more comfortable giving help than receiving it. We would rather be self-sufficient than needy. We rather would be charitable than a charity case.

A great difficulty in being a Christian for many of us is not so much recognizing that we should be good to our neighbors, broadly defined. (We know we should, and we know we fail.) The great difficulty is recognizing that we also have need of mercy and knowing how to accept it. We are struggling and we need others to get us through. We need God to give us mercy.

~Rev. Karen Matuska

## **Tuesday, March 7**

### *Luke 10: 25 – 37: Parable of the Good Samaritan*

It seems that there are at least two ways to consider this parable: One is that we are being implored to practice our moral and spiritual obligations to be kind and helpful to those in need. The other is the great possibility that Jesus is condemning the extreme prejudice of the Jewish people toward the Samaritans. If you will note, both a Jewish priest and a Levite ignored this victim of robbery/assault and battery - primarily one assumes because they recognized the victim as not being one of their own. Had the victim been of Jewish decent, both the priest and the Levite most likely would have immediately rendered assistance.

The Samaritan, however, did not discriminate based on race or creed as to who this victim might be, but selflessly came to his aid. It's easy to claim that we are not prejudice, or that we do not

discriminate. We can even point with pride to knowing or working with “people of color, or those of religious beliefs other than Christian”. Do we purposely start conversations with these “others” to find out what they really think or feel, or what difficulties they may be experiencing? Do we get to know them on a personal basis? Overcoming the fear of interacting with anyone different from us is what I feel the Good Samaritan demonstrated. “Jesus said, Go and do likewise.”

~Rich Johnson

### **Wednesday, March 8**

Reading this passage sparked a flashback to my childhood. I still remember my mother calling Aunt Marcelle “a Martha” in reference to her fastidious housekeeping. These days I wonder “don’t we need some Marthas?” Who would provide food for funeral lunches? Who would balance the budget? Who would mow the lawn? Still, I consider the familiar message in Ephesians 2, we are saved by the gift of God’s grace and not works. What about Mary’s choice? What are my opportunities today to follow her role model? Worship. Prayer. Bible reading. Maybe living intentionally to preserve our planet.

What I need to do is pray for wisdom. When does Jesus want me sitting at his feet listening to his teaching and when would it be better for me to be serving in the kitchen? As they say, well-behaved women rarely make history, so trust in God’s guidance and follow wherever he leads.

~Judy Leiseth

### **Thursday, March 9**

*Luke 10: 29: But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

Almost everyone who saw them just kept on driving. Wishing to justify themselves, they thought of the danger of picking up hitchhikers. They thought of the risk to their personal safety. Wishing to justify themselves, they imagined the

inconvenience to others if they were late for their appointments. They thought of dirty, strange children tracking red dust onto their car seats and smearing their clean windows with their filthy hands. So, wishing to justify themselves, they kept on driving. Except for Deborah. My friend was a brand-new Christian, and when she saw the woman, the kids, the broken-down car, she thought of this parable, and saw this struggling family...and pulled over. She was eager to share the love of Christ with them, so she loaded them into her car: strange, dirty, smelly, etc. She took them home, told them Jesus loved them, showed them the way to fresh clothes and baths while she did their laundry, and made them lunch. And while they ate? My friend brazenly and boldly called every Christian she knew (and some that she did not!) and asked for money to help get this family on their way.

Wishing to justify myself, I was shocked and embarrassed when she told me what she had done. I had introduced her to most of the people she had called, and I wondered what on earth they must be thinking of her...of me. Wishing to justify myself, I spoke to her of personal risk and danger. I advised her of the need to do things carefully and with caution so that no one gets hurt and enabling behaviors are avoided. And I still think those things are true. But when I read this parable, and when I remember my friend, I am challenged. Maybe you are, too?

*Prayer: Father God, I want to extend the love of Christ as Deborah did – freely and without reservation. I want to rely on the justification I receive because of Christ’s sacrifice on my behalf, not on anything I can conjure up on my own. Thank you for this parable and Deborah’s real-life example. Thank you for Christ’s loving and patient teaching. Help us to live lives that please you. Amen.*

~Sharla Saunders

## Friday, March 10

Martha and Mary—the two sisters who on the surface seem to be polar opposites. There is Martha, the doer—focused on tasks, organized, goal-oriented. She gets a lot done, but is sometimes critical of those who don't pitch in or perhaps don't do as much as she does. Then, there is Mary, the thinker—spiritually-oriented, seeking to grow in her faith and to know her LORD. But, because of her focus, she may sometimes be oblivious to the immediate needs of those around her.

This struggle is not only evident between Martha and Mary; it exists within each individual. How do we find balance between religion (acting on our faith) and relationship (growing in our faith)? Jesus responded to Martha's frustration by reminding her that while Jesus was still with them, Mary had chosen the better way--to sit at Jesus' feet, to learn and to grow in her faith. Jesus was not being critical of Martha, but asking her (and us) to determine what is truly needed in our lives.

In Ecclesiastes Solomon tells us that there is a time and a season for all things under heaven. In our faith walk we learn that it is never the choice between one or the other, service or spiritual growth, but a balance between the two. There is time to use our hands to serve the LORD and a time to sit at Jesus' feet, hands folded, to listen to Him. Have you found a balance between the two in your life?

***Prayer:** LORD, how gracious you are to allow us to have a relationship with you, while we are here on earth. May we cherish and nourish that relationship. And, as a direct result from knowing and loving you, may we serve you and be the blessing to others that you have called us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

~Rich and Judy Heeren

## Saturday, March 11



In my office, I have a picture of Mary, Martha and Jesus. I've included it in this reflection so you can also see it. This image has captured my heart for quite some time. Years ago I went to a retreat and was invited to do what's called a 'Visio Divina' with it. We had several minutes to consider what each of us were drawn to in the image. Which characters might we identify with the most/least and why? What emotions, if any were evoked and what might God be inviting us to see on that

particular day, for whatever season of life and faith we found ourselves.

I can still remember my take-away from that time of reflection. I had identified more with Martha than with Mary on that day. As I spent time considering the story from Luke 10, I felt the kind support of my Savior's hand on my shoulder and was surprised for my heart to hear, "I see you". These simple words put a worried and busied heart at ease. While Jesus said what Mary had chosen to do was better, I was not chastised for wanting to serve and wanting to get things done. Rather, I was seen and who I am created to be came back into perspective. I was created to love and serve both God and my neighbor, yet I was also created to be in relationship with God. On that day, Jesus saw I was "worried and distracted by many things" (Luke 10: 41) and I was invited to see the "need of only one thing" (Luke 10:42) and spend time resting in the Lord. After all, the jar would still be there regardless.

**Blessing:** May you find peace for your weary soul today knowing that God sees you and is grateful for your love and service to Him and His people. And may you find peace for your weary soul today

knowing that only one thing is needed. Rest, brothers and sisters,  
in Christ.

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IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE A REFLECTION FOR *PERSPECTIVES*,  
PLEASE EMAIL MARY AT [M.STONEBACK@ASCENSIONCOS.ORG](mailto:M.STONEBACK@ASCENSIONCOS.ORG)

## **Lenten Mid-Week Series: Beneath the Cross**

*Join us for Soup Suppers at 6 pm in the basement and then  
service at 7 pm in the sanctuary.*

March 8: Immortality is already ours? Pr Daniel Smith

March 15: A Grasping after Life. Pr Dan Holt

March 22: Finding Spiritual Life Team Stretch

March 29: Living Well nearing the End. Pr Karen Matuska

April 5: Making a Good End. Tom Vien CSFS



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