

PERSPECTIVES

Beneath The Cross

www.ascensioncos.org



A Lenten Devotional - Week 3

March 19-25, 2017

Luke 15:1-32

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.

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.

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 Lost Sheep

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

⁸ “Or what woman having ten silver coins,^[a] if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

¹¹ Then Jesus^[b] said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the

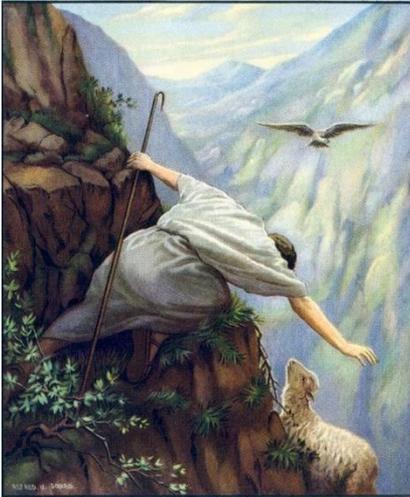
pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with^[c] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’^[d] ²² But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father^[e] said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Sunday, March 19

Today Pastor Dan preached on Luke 15:1-32, which includes a few challenging parables. On this second Sunday of Lent, we invite you to spend time in God's Word. Read through this passage, and consider Pastor Dan's reflection on the text. If you missed today's service, visit www.ascensioncos.org to hear the message.

Monday, March 20



“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do?

Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.

Luke 15:4-5 (NLT)

“I'm all alone and it's getting dark! Nobody saw me fall into the

ravine – not even my mother. That was hours ago. I tried to crawl out but my leg is swollen and throbbing. No one heard my cries for help and now my voice is hoarse and broken. I'm scared!”

The little sheep was lost and forlorn – her situation desperate. As she looked up, a shadow fell over the ravine. It was the shepherd, her savior. He climbed down and hoisted the little sheep over his shoulders, tenderly carrying her to safety.

Who among us hasn't felt like that lamb? Sometimes the challenges and cares of life are more than we can bear. Even though we try our best, it's so easy to stumble into a hole. We look around but find no friendly arm to help us up – until Jesus appears.

Our Lord misses us when we're lost and will search until he finds us. As he gently picks us up, we nestle into his arms. As he carries us home, his step is light and joyful. After all, we are very valuable sheep!

Jesus – you know how easy it is for us to go astray. Like the lamb in the parable, we sometimes worry that we'll never be found again. But you always seek us out. Keep us safe in your pasture with our ninety-nine friends now and always. Amen.

~Lisa Wulf

Tuesday, March 21

Luke: 15: 1 – 7: When our sons were little we used to place one of our business cards in their shoes whenever we traveled somewhere new or crowded. We would write our cell phone numbers in bold Sharpie on the back of the card and carefully explain to each boy what to do if he became lost. We'd diligently review how to locate a "safe adult" and remove their shoe with our cell phone numbers carefully contained inside. Let's face it, having a child go missing is likely in the top 5 worst nightmares of many parents.

What a relief when I read my Heavenly Parent's response to a "missing sheep"! *"Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"* (Luke 15:4) He leaves His other sheep in the open country and goes to look for one missing sheep. I am so precious to Him that He will leave 99 other perfectly good sheep to search for me; the wayward sheep. And I feel blessed to have a Good Shepherd taking note of when I am lost. I can assure you that usually when I am "lost" I don't even realize it until I hear His voice calling me.

And what does He do when he finds His lost sheep? *"And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home."* (Luke 15: 5) He is not angry. He doesn't punish the wayward sheep, but joyfully, tenderly welcomes it back to the flock. What a blessing to be joyfully welcomed home even when I

strayed of my own volition. It reminds me of the words Pastor Dan said on Ash Wednesday, “And so we put that (cross of ashes) on our foreheads trusting that God will hold us through the worst of everything.”

Dearest Lord, I am grateful for your tender loving care of me especially in those times I am more like a lost sheep than a mature believer. Thank you that you promise to never let me go. Not in my earthly life or in the life to come. Amen.

~Elisa Thompson

Wednesday, March 22

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands” (Luke 15:18b-19)

He had the speech all ready. He was practicing it as he made the long walk back to his father’s house. He was going to admit his sin, admit how his sin made him unworthy, and beg for mercy. Not even full mercy – he’s not worthy of that. Just a little bit. Just enough to avoid starving. “Make me one of your hired hands.” Just that much mercy.

As he practiced, as he walked that long rode, the anxiety rose within him. Would his father accept him? Would he even be willing to listen to him? And, if he did, would he believe him? Would his words of confession and regret be convincing enough for his father to believe him, to believe that he truly was repentant? And then he wondered, do I even truly believe them? Or am I just desperate?

He came to the gates, and began to practice the speech once more in his head. Then he lifted the latch. The familiar screeching of the gate at once brought a soothing reminder of home and also announced to anyone within ear shot that he was there. There was no hiding now. His father came running down the path to him. He swallowed hard and, with all the look of regret he could muster, he began his speech. “Father, I have sinned against ...”

“You’re home! You’re home! But, you’re so worn and cold. Quickly, you, go get the best robe and the ring and sandals for my son’s feet. And you, prepare a fatted calf for a celebration. My son who was dead is alive! He was lost and is found!”

Frenzy erupted all about them as the father embraced his son. The full speech was never heard. The carefully choreographed expression of remorse was never seen. The father didn’t seem to even listen to the part that was spoken. He didn’t seem to care. It wasn’t remorse he had been waiting for. It wasn’t repentance or sorrow or apology or argument or vindication. It was only his lost child. And upon seeing him his heart was filled with joy.

Our Father, we have wandered and hidden from your face; in foolishness have squandered your legacy of grace. ... In haste you come to meet us and home rejoicing bring, in gladness there to greet us with calf and robe and ring. (ELW 606)

~Pastor Daniel Smith

Thursday, March 23

Lost. It’s a simple word, but, in this text, that simple word has a lot of meaning. In this text, I found ‘lost’ to be less of a word and more of a feeling. An emotion. To ‘feel’ lost is something, I think, everyone experiences at some point in their life and anyone that has ever ‘felt’ lost will tell you that it’s not a pleasant experience. When I think about the times that I’ve felt lost in my life, I remember also feeling alone and confused. For me, feeling lost is scary.

But this passage is a pleasant reminder that there is always hope for those of us that feel lost. It’s a reminder that, no matter how lost we feel, our Father is always looking for us and waiting for us to return home. It’s a reminder that when we do finally make our way back home, we will be greeted with open arms. All of that makes feeling lost a lot less scary.

I feel like feeling lost once in a while is completely unavoidable. We've all been there and we will all most definitely be there again. We are all lost sheep trying to find our way. Just remember to have faith that our Lord is always with us to help us find our way and He will be there smiling when we do.

~Sadie Hjelmstad

Friday, March 24

In our modern society “Lost and Found“ is a common notion of bringing together an owner and a lost item. I remember the joy I felt when something important was found. Years ago, at the end of our night shift caring for patients in the hospital, a co-worker said, “I’ve lost my diamond”. Her large diamond had come loose from her wedding ring sometime during the night. Dread and gloom set in. How many rooms had we entered?, beds made?, or drawers opened? I couldn’t count. The possibility of finding a diamond lost during an entire shift seemed hopeless to me. We began our search in a room just as a patient had just gotten up from her bed. We searched the bed, turned down the blankets, removed the pillow and smoothed each wrinkle looking for a clear diamond among the white sheets. My friend leaned over to tuck in the sheets and looked beneath the bed. She jumped up and shouted “I found it!” WOW, I felt joy, relief and even smile to this day today when I recall this event.

“Lost and Found” in this passage of Luke has a much deeper and personal meaning. Jesus describes through these parables the significance of being found. If I, like the lost sheep is found, then God has searched for me. If I, like the lost coin is found, then I have worth. If I, like the lost son am found, then I am welcomed and loved by my Father in heaven. Then what is our response? WOW. But even more, Jesus says to rejoice, rejoice with friends and neighbors, be glad and celebrate. And even more. There is rejoicing in heaven and rejoicing in the presence of angels of God.

Lord, I thank you for the joys in life like finding that diamond. Most of all, thank you for finding and saving me. Let us be glad and rejoice. Amen.

~Lorada Shrawder

Saturday, March 25

When I read and pondered on these three parables, I was overjoyed with the thought that God will always rejoice and welcome us back into his Kingdom. In the parable of the lost sheep, one sheep out of the flock got lost...probably because he wandered off and didn't even realize he was lost. But the Shepherd didn't worry about the rest of the flock and went and found...and then rejoiced over finding the one lost sheep who through ignorance became lost. In the parable of the lost coin, it wasn't the coin's fault that it was lost and it probably wasn't a very valuable coin, but yet the owner was overjoyed because she found the lost coin. In the parable of the lost son, the father was overjoyed when the son made his way home. In the sheep parable, the sheep became lost because he wasn't that smart. The coin became lost through no fault of his own. The son was lost because of his deliberate actions. But in all cases, the person who had lost the object was overcome with joy at their return.

It is reassuring to know that our God is a caring God, a forgiving God, and a God whose kingdom is open to all. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he ministers to those on the fringe of society...those who could never earn their way into heaven. Whether we lose our way through our own ignorance (sheep), or through something we have no control over (coin), or through our own intentional actions (lost son), God will always welcome us back into his Kingdom. And while it doesn't seem very fair to those who work hard to be good Christians for their entire life, it is reassuring that God always rejoices when one who is lost returns to the flock. *(prayer on next page)*

Father, thank you for your unbelievable Grace and never ending desire to bring your entire creation into your Kingdom. Find me when I lose my way and help me to be as forgiving as the father who regained his lost son.

~John Hayes

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 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

Holy Week at Ascension

Sunday April 9 – Palm Sunday

Thursday April 13 – Maundy Thursday (7 pm)

Friday April 14 – Good Friday (12 pm & 7 pm)

Saturday April 15 – Easter Vigil, led by HS youth (6 pm)

Sunday April 16 – Easter Sunrise (6 am) & Easter Services (8 am & 10:30 am)

**A pancake breakfast will be served 7 am – 8 am & 9 am – 10 am in the basement. All proceeds go to support the youth!*



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