

PERSPECTIVES

Beneath The Cross

www.ascensioncos.org



A Lenten Devotional - Week 2

March 12-18, 2017

Luke 13:1-9, 31-35

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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Luke 13:1-9, 31-35

Luke 13:1-9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Luke 13:31-35 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Lament over Jerusalem

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³² He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me,^[a] ‘Listen, I am casting

out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when^[b] you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Sunday, March 12

Today Pastor Daniel preached on Luke 13:1-9, 31-35, 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 13

Luke 13:1-5. “Where is the grace in this passage?” I wailed to Dan after first reading it! Jesus states two times (so we must pay attention!), “Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Yikes! Such harsh words!

If I take “repent” to mean “turn from sin” or “turn from going my own way,” Jesus is exhorting us in his statement to turn to him to find life. God grieves through the prophet Jeremiah, “They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.” (Jer. 32:53). When we choose to turn our backs to God and go our own way, we suffer the

consequences and we perish in some way. Let us be a people who would turn our faces and attention to God! For in Jesus Christ we find true life.

“I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.” (Jer. 32:40). Oh, Father, may it be so with us!
~Sylvia Holt

Tuesday, March 14

In our first set of verses Jesus is talking about repenting for our sins, not just asking for forgiveness, but rather start anew and leave the old behind. In Jesus’ parable he once again shows God’s mercy by giving the plant, us, one more chance to produce fruit. How many chances has God given you to repent of your sinful ways and come to him? God is like that parent who has a struggling child who wants to see him or her succeed and will keep nurturing that child in order for them to be successful.

Later in the Chapter Jesus is speaking of Jerusalem as being that child who just doesn’t get it, and keeps finding ways to fail, but Jesus continues to give them one more chance to succeed. I ask myself, how many one more chances, has God given them and how many more will he give?

As you stand beneath the cross this Lenten season, think of times in your life where God has had to prune you to allow you to grow and be closer to him rather than casting you aside. It hurts, but he is there with you to nurture you and help you grow closer to him.

Prayer: Lord God, during this season of lent, help us to see and repent of our sinful ways and we ask you to nurture us so we might be gathered together with you.

~Greg Gulliksen

Wednesday, March 15

There was a lot to study in this passage, but what stood out to me was the parable. In Jesus' parable, the man was ready to kill and remove the fig tree, because it was not producing as the man had expected it to. He even waited three years, and checked on it routinely. I imagined that he had stormed over to the gardener, and expected the gardener to agree and cut it down promptly. But the gardener asked the man to leave it alone, and next year it will get fertilized, and then it should fruit. Then, if it does not, it would be ok to cut it down.

I was stuck by the man's frustration over something that he had little control over, even when it was working just fine. I looked up when a fig tree is expected to produce fruit, and they need at least four years. Out of curiosity, I looked up how long grapevines take, since the parable mentions that the man had the fig tree in his vineyard. Grape vines need just three years before they start to bloom. The man was not a dummy, but he applied what he knew about grape vines to a completely different kind of plant, and was ready to destroy the fig tree for not behaving like a grape vine.

Dear God, I know I like to have things figured out. Like the man in the parable, I know enough about a tiny part of how the world works, and I try to apply it to everything. I pray that I don't miss the point, that fig trees are very different from grape vines. That not everything happens the way I expect it to, but that it does not mean that nothing is happening. I know that you are doing new things all around us, in surprising ways. Amen

~Elizabeth Diehl

Thursday, March 16

In these two short passages from Luke, one part particularly caught my attention - the parable of the fig tree. A man owed a fig tree, but noticed that it bore no fruit, and so wanted his gardener to cut it down. The gardener says that he will aerate the ground around it, and fertilize it, and if, after a year, it still bears no fruit, then the man who owns it can cut it down. Why does this capture my attention?

In this story, I see hope. The gardener is not willing to give up on the tree. He sees its potential, even though it isn't showing much potential in the story right then. He wants to give it some extra attention, and some food, and a chance to prove itself. I feel that this is what I, as a teacher, am called to do for students, and what I, as a person, am called to do for people when they fall short of my expectations. Give them a little extra attention, a little extra food (praise, help, etc.) and some time to prove themselves, and you never know what surprises you might end up with! I have been lucky enough to have people treat me this way, from time to time, and I hope that I treat others this way, more often than not, although I always need reminders!

Lord, please help us all to look for ways to help people show their true potential. Help us to offer attention, food for the body and soul and spirit, and a chance to grow. Help us to see the hope in new beginnings and the promise of things yet to come.

Amen.

~Ingrid Daniel

Friday, March 17

Jesus' love for us is so evident in this passage! He states, '...on the 3rd day I will reach my goal.' His goal all along is to go to the cross and die for us and be raised on the

3rd day. Truly, God demonstrates his love for us in that while we still sinners, Christ died for us.

When I was a preschooler, we raised chickens for eggs and for Sunday dinner! There was no protection overhead for the hens or chicks from the hawks that roamed the skies. If a hawk was spotted, the hens would send up a ruckus, squawking anxiously for their chicks to come immediately to take shelter under their safe, warm wings. Those fuzzy, cute chicks that ignored the summons left themselves open to the danger of being carried away as a hawk's snack (much to our dismay!)

This Lenten season, let us be a people that respond to Jesus' summons to come to him. Let's create a space in our home and plenty of time in our schedules to be with the Lord, to read the Word, to pray. Let the Spirit gather us to a place under God's "wings", a place of safety and loving care. May we not be a people who refuse Jesus ("...but you were not willing!) and are left desolate (v. 34.). For eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. (Jn. 17:3)

*"Thy holy wings, O Savior, spread gently over me,
and let me rest securely through good and ill in thee.
Oh, be my strength and portion, my rock and hiding place,
And let my every moment be lived within thy grace."*

~Sylvia Holt

Saturday, March 18

As I read through the parable of the fig tree, I have to admit I was a little nervous. Although the tree is spared for another year, that was a close call. I wonder if the tree made the cut the following year or failed to yield a crop again. And the more I sat with the discomfort of this passage, I began to see why the story made me uncomfortable.

How often have you heard or maybe even said yourself, “if I knew then what I know now...” Life is fertile ground for growth, spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally but it takes time. A lifetime. We are given the gift and challenge to make choices like what schools to attend, the best meals to prepare and what matters most in how we use our time. Yet growth is more than simply our choices.

As Christians, the process of growing in understanding of who God is and who we are as God’s children takes time, a lot of time. A lifetime. While I believe there is much joy in the growth we may experience, there is also discomfort and pain. When there is change, there is loss. Think of a child getting their first tooth. What a joyous occasion...minus the screaming and crying for weeks before the new tooth finally arrived. This is growth. Pain and joy. How does this connect with the Parable of the fig tree?

The gardener wanted to nurture the fig tree longer. Maybe after another year the fig tree yielded fruit again. Maybe not. We do not get the end of this parable. I think that’s much like life. We do not always (most of the time) ultimately know what our lives will look like in totality. We can do the interview, audition for the group, plan the event and do the work but, the outcome as to what is grown from seeds planted will take time. Sometimes a day, maybe a week and other times, maybe even never. Regardless, it’s a lifetime process we are blessed to journey with God together.

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Serenity Prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
forever in the next.
Amen.*

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 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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