

PERSPECTIVES

Beneath The Cross

www.ascensioncos.org



A Lenten Devotional - Week 4

March 26-April 1, 2017

Luke 16:19-31

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 graveling 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 16:19-31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.^[a] The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.^[b] ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses

and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.””

Sunday, March 26

Today Pastor Dan preached on Luke 16:19-31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, translating a sermon written in 1523 by Martin Luther. On this fourth 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 27

In 1523, Luther wrote a Sermon on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus. It was so popular that it was reprinted 8 times. I am going to divide my edited version of his sermon into two parts. The introduction and his words on the Rich man are part one. Part two will be on Lazarus.

Part 1: Introduction & The Rich Man

We have heard in our Gospel lessons of various examples of faith and of love. I hope you are abundantly informed that no human beings can be pleasing to God unless they believe and love. In this Gospel lesson the Lord presents to us at the same time an example of faith and of unbelief. He does so in order that we also may abhor the opposite of faith and love, and that we may cleave to faith and love more diligently. In the end of this Gospel lesson we see the judgment of God upon the believers and the unbelievers, which is both dreadful and comforting. Dreadful to the faithless and comforting to the faithful. In order to grasp the

meaning of this lesson we must picture ourselves as both the rich man and poor Lazarus. In the rich man we see the nature of unbelief and in Lazarus the nature of belief.

This rich man was not punished because he indulged in sumptuous food and fine clothing. Since many saints, kings and queens of ancient times wore costly apparel like Solomon, Esther, David and others. But because his heart was attached to them, and he sought them and trusted in them and found in them his joy and delight, he made them into his idols. From this is seen that he diligently sought and chose such a life. It was not forced on him nor did he get there by accident nor did he do so because of his calling. He gratified his own lust and lived to himself and served himself.

From this sin follows the other sin, that he forgot to exercise love toward his neighbor; for there he let poor Lazarus lie at his door and offered him not the least assistance. And if he had not wished to help him directly, he should have commanded his servants to take him in and care for him. Maybe he didn't know God and God's goodness. For whoever feels the goodness of God, feels also for the misfortune of his neighbor. As he has no pleasure in God, he has no heart for his neighbor.

The nature of faith is that it expects all good from God, and relies on God. From this faith one can know that God is good and gracious and one's heart can be tender and merciful. As one experiences God's goodness, one cheerfully wishes to do good – loving and serving neighbor. Out of such belief a person is not concerned for those doing well so much as the sick, weak, poor, despised and sinful people – people he can benefit, and among whom he can exercise his tender heart.

~Pastor Dan Holt

Tuesday, March 28

Part 2: Lazarus

Part 2 of my edited version of Luther's Sermon on the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus written in 1523.

We must not judge poor Lazarus in his sores, poverty and anxiety, according to his outward appearance. Many people suffer afflictions and want and gain nothing from it. Poverty and suffering don't make people acceptable to God. Looking into the heart of Lazarus we see the treasure that made his sores so precious, namely his faith and love. Even in the midst of poverty and misery, he expected good from God and relied upon God. He had such pleasure in God that he would have heartily and willingly suffered even more misery if God would have willed it.

From his faith followed another virtue, namely love of neighbor, so that he is willing and ready to serve everybody; but since Lazarus is poor and in misery himself, he had nothing with which he could serve others. But he serves us now, long after his death. His bodily hunger feeds our spiritual hunger. His bodily nakedness clothes our spiritual nakedness his bodily sores heal our spiritual sores. By his example, he teaches us how God is pleased with us when we are not prosperous here upon the earth.

Believers are like poor Lazarus and every believer is a true Lazarus, for he is of the same faith, mind and will. For we all must like Lazarus trust in God, surrender ourselves to him and to work in us according to his own good pleasure and be ready to serve all. And although we may not suffer from such sores and poverty, yet the same mind and will must be in us, that were in Lazarus, to bear up under such things whenever God wills it.

A spirit and mind like Lazarus can exist with those who

have very great possessions as was the case for David and Abraham. Otherwise, how could God so favor King David when he possessed extensive lands and large cities? Although he indeed possessed these, his heart did not cling to them and they were as nothing compared with the riches he had with God. In a similar way, he had said of the health of his body was as nothing compared to the health of his soul before God. David would indeed not have murmured had God afflicted him with bodily sores and sickness.

So it was with Abraham who entered our story at the end. Although Abraham had not the poverty and affliction of Lazarus, yet he had the mind and will to bear what Lazarus did and would have if God had visited it upon him. For the saints have this same inner mind and spirit, but they do not have the same outward work and suffering. Abraham recognized in Lazarus a kindred spirit of faith and love and so welcomed him. It is this example of faith living for God which is the sum and meaning of this Gospel. It was given to you so that you may see, how faith living for God everywhere saves and unbelief condemns.

~Pastor Dan Holt

Wednesday, March 29

The title of this parable in the Bible I use is “Lazarus and the Rich Man.” What strikes me about this title is that the poor man, a beggar with sores all over his body, is named and the rich man is not. I am aware that in that day the poor were not named and the rich were because the rich thought they had riches because they were being rewarded by God for their goodness. But that is not the message of this parable. Lazarus is the one who is named, is blessed in heaven and is given the place of honor at the banquet sitting next to Abraham. The rich man ends up in Hades and is worried about his brothers

and thinks he can command Lazarus to go warn them. But Jesus says they have “Moses and the Prophets” in other word the Scriptures, which we also have. We also have the Good News of “someone risen from the dead.”

What this all says to me is that we are to do all we can with the gifts that we have been given to help the poor.

Prayer: O God I confess that I often don’t think about the poor and don’t always know the best way to help. I pray for wisdom and courage to do what I can to help the poor. Amen

~Pastor Phil Erlander

Thursday, March 30

This is one of those parables you learn in childhood when, to me, it was just a simple “poor unfortunate good guy, rich ol’ bad guy” story. Until I reached the young adult/college years when, for me in particular, I questioned and usually, over analyzed everything and those parables became less clear than they were just a “few” years before. More than that, they seemed to raise more questions than I could answer. It hasn’t changed much over the years.

I’m sharing the questions I think about often when I consider this parable. History tells us that in Jesus’ day most people used fingers and bread as utensils to bring food-to-mouth, rich or poor, except the rich also used the bread to wipe their hands and the food-and-bread mixes were thrown out the “gate/wall” where the dogs and beggars would eat it. Lazarus was probably representative of the many beggars and dogs living there. (I guess that’s a “duh” statement). So, did the rich man not know they were there? I doubt it. Did he completely disregard them? Probably. Did he chase them away? Doesn’t sound like it. Didn’t it bother him or make him feel guilty? Good question, but apparently not.

Another question. Did the rich man believe that Lazarus' station in life and physical afflictions were the result of something his parents or he did to offend God and these were the natural consequences? So stay away? The words attributed to Abraham makes me think the rich man and Lazarus were both Jews, and had the same lessons in scripture and history and also the same taboos. This parable doesn't deal with this really, but I think about it. (still overanalyzing, I guess)

What about today? Those on our street corners, what signs are real and what are not? I have encountered both. Do we make the judgement? Do we not? Rather than hand out cash we are urged to support agencies that can help them. What of those who do not want organized help??? Do I feel guilty when I pass by them? Yes, I do. Do I offer cash? No, I don't. Do I go buy a hamburger or sandwich? Occasionally. Do I know what to do? Not really. I argue with myself. Do I discuss this with God? ALL THE TIME! This discussion, God, is that your plan? God of all, open my eyes, calm my heart, help my hands to do your work.

~Wini Klein

Friday, March 31

Luke 16:19-31: We've all heard the age-old saying that "Money can't buy happiness." This is undoubtedly true, as we see in the media every day. It's not hard to imagine how wealth could lead to more, not less problems in life. On the other hand, money is an unavoidable reality of life in America. Owning a home, going to college, seeing the world, starting a family, and many other blessings we might receive, all require some amount of money. I believe it's these types of things, and not extravagant luxuries that motivate many

people's ambitions for wealth.

Today's passage from Luke seems to be at odds with this sentiment. At first glance, it appears to suggest that to "receive good things" is sinful because others "receive bad things". In a world with constant suffering, it sounds as if no one should enjoy blessings. However, something that stands out to me in this passage is the beggar Lazarus lying at the rich man's gate. You can envision how the rich man must have looked away every time he passed Lazarus on the road. This mental image communicates more to me than the actual words of the passage. Perhaps the message isn't that wealth and means make us sinners, but that they oblige us not to ignore the sufferings of others.

~Patrick DeLoughry

Saturday, April 1

This is a full passage, with a lot of meaning and conjures up a plethora of questions. Take today to review the questions lifted up in week four's reflections. Are there any which seem to jump out at you from the page? Which questions are unsettling? Spend some time journaling your thoughts and commit these questions to God in prayer.

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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 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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