

Pastor's Point

...the Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life.

Genesis 2:7

CEB



To those of us raised in low-church traditions or who have bad experiences with high church liturgy, Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent can feel a little strange. Advent, we get — it's the time when we prepare for Christmas, when we actively look for Christ to be born among us. And so we light candles and speak words of hope and decorate the sanctuary and sing festive hymns. Advent makes sense.

But Lent, well lent feels uncomfortable, foreign to our Protestant senses. The language of repentance and fasting, of study and sacrifice is less than celebratory. It may even make us feel defensive, as though the concept of grace has been forgotten. We don't need these old school traditions; no one really cares about them. Best to just let it go and maybe give up chocolate.

I want to suggest that the practice of Lent, and Ash Wednesday which marks its start, are just as essential as Advent and Christmas. For these six weeks, we live the journey of Christ and his disciples, following his path through Palestine and into Jerusalem. We stand at the top of a hill, ready to roll downward ever faster toward Good Friday and the hope of Easter Sunday. In many ways, we are preparing to be crucified alongside Jesus, to sit in the dark, and to rise again, baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Throughout scripture, in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures, children of God are called to repentance, to turn away from ego, fear, and greed toward community, love, and generosity. Often this is marked not only by confession and right action, but also by the donning of Ashes and sack cloth, a practice meant to remind humans of our own fragility and humility. We are not perfect, we are not God, no matter how deeply we wish it so. Instead we are mortal creatures, prone to self-centered perspectives and mistakes. We are dust, formed by God's hand and filled with Divine breath. And to dust we will return, Divine breath or no.

So I encourage you this Lenten season to take on a spiritual discipline — be it prayer, scripture study, service — and to face your own humanity knowing you are beloved because you were created in the image and called good. Even when you don't think you are.

Blessings,

Pastor Heather