

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2.1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58.1-12; Psalm 103; 2 Corinthians 5.20b-6.10;
Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21

It's all about you ...

“A reflection for today: dust
You are dust and Divine breath,
You are formed of the earth,
and sent by the Spirit.
You are the object of God’s infinite
dream, and desire, and destiny,
You are dust and Divine breath.
You are more than the things you possess,
You are more than busyness you become,
You are more than enough, always!
You are loved and beloved.
You are dust and Divine breath.
Remember.”

*The Rt. Rev. Deon Johnson, Bishop, Diocese of Missouri, Ash Wednesday meditation of
Facebook 02/22/2023*

Remember ... that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Today is a day of reflection. And, yes, today begins a season of introspection. We so often hear the expression when we react to something someone does that upsets us, “Well, it’s not always all about you!” And, for the most part in our lives, especially as

Christians, it *isn't* about us but about God's work in us as we seek and serve Christ in others.

But, the next 40 days it *is* all about us, isn't it?

It's about us turning and focusing on ourselves as we relate to God's invitation to each of us through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our lord and savior. It's about God's intention to draw us nearer to God's Beloved Community.

How can we be more Christ-like?

How can we be more loving?

How can we show God's grace even in the most adverse situations?

How do we prepare ourselves? #

We have been given a gift ... a beautiful gift of 40 days to take that first step in becoming members of that Community.#

This evening we turn ... for a period of fasting, meditation, prayer and service. We are given an assigned number of days to work on ourselves, getting it right and more aligned with Christ-like

thinking so that at the celebration of the resurrection we will *re*-turn to a time of even closer to God than we are at this point.

This evening we accept the ashes that signify to us, as outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, that we are “the dust and the divine breath” as described by The Rt Rev Deon Johnson, Bishop of the Diocese of Missouri.

How do we do that?

Sometimes it feels like we’re getting mixed messages when we hear, in combination, the scripture for this day.

While Joel exhorts us to rend our hearts not our clothing, he also exhorts us to return with fasting, and weeping and mourning.

Our Psalm offers encouragement to go forth into this Lenten desert, trusting that God will meet us with open arms as we intentionally offer ourselves to self-examination, turning to be more attentive to God’s will rather than our own.

Paul in 2nd Corinthians invites us to be reconciled to God. We are offered, yet once again, a time of salvation. A time to get it right. A “do-over”.

And yet, we are cautioned by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew to not be “show-offs”, seeking attention in our actions.

So how do we honor both?

We begin this evening by accepting the ashes and being reminded of our mortality. We begin by recognizing how woefully lacking are we in becoming members of the Beloved Community.

We commit to an intentional (physical, mental and spiritual) walk though the next 40 days, finding time to spend with God.

We join with others on their own faith journeys and encourage and affirm their journeys as they will ours. (We might even ask how their journeys are going. Have they experienced any challenges that throw them off track or any very special “aha” moments? We may offer to pray with them. And we muster up the courage to share our own faith stories and “aha” moments with them, not with “bragging

rights” but with the intent on affirming where they are in their walks.

We may make ourselves physically present for the Lenten Series over the next 6 Wednesdays as we literally discover how to use the steps of turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go and rest to bring us into a fuller realization of our intentions.

We may intentionally set aside time to *simply be still and know that God is God* and await answers that will help us move forward to achieve these goals.

We are called to be present. To be present to ourselves ... and present to God ... as an offering ... as the hands and feet of Jesus ... and we are to open our hearts to a new way in order to understand who and how we are called to be and what we are called to do. We joyfully accept the gift of time to make more of us than we ever thought possible.#

As you go forth from this place of love remember that over the next several weeks of your holy pilgrimage God’s unconditional love

as well as that of your brothers and sisters love goes with you (even on some days when perhaps being conscious of putting one foot in front of the other is all that you can manage.

Remember.

Remember that you are You are dust and Divine breath,

You are formed of the earth and sent by the Spirit.

Remember.

Amen.