

Ash Wednesday 2017

Ash Wednesday is a day when we are stopped dead in our tracks.

And the pun is definitely intended.

We don't wear these ashes to demonstrate our piety, but to recognize our mortality.

And to remind anyone who might take a look at these black smudges on our foreheads that they too are mortal.

Today we stop dead in our tracks so that we can remember where we've come from.

Our year started with Advent, the weeks before Christmas, when we prepare, yes, to welcome the baby, but also, more importantly, to look forward to the time when all things will be brought to a conclusion.

That conclusion is the day when God makes all things new, this earth, the heavens and each and everyone of us.

And where we've been since then is to help get us ready for that day.

Because the question posed to everyone is this: when God's kingdom does arrive, is it a place that I'd like to be?

So after Christmas, we spent a great deal of time learning from Jesus just what God's kingdom looks like.

We have listened in as Jesus turns the whole world on its head, exchanging our love for the rich and famous for God's love for the down and out; putting a red light in the face of our justified angers and resentments, turning a green light on the love of enemies, the surrender of self; all of which comes to a head as the transfigured Jesus, shining like the sun, once again picks up the pace on that dusty road on his way to Calvary, where glory and pain meet, where suffering and redemption kiss.

This journey from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to the Transfiguration to today is no accident.

We need it!

We need it because we somehow, against all odds, gotta get used to God's strange kingdom because, let's face it, if you're like me, we are slow learners when it comes to the way of God.

It's the story I know you know but today is worth hearing again.

It's the story of how heaven and hell are so much the same, and yet so very different.

In hell, everyone has 3 foot long chopsticks, and they are starving because they can't feed themselves - the sticks are too long!

In heaven, everyone has 3 foot chopsticks too, but everyone is eating well, because in heaven, they feed each other!

Ash Wednesday rolls around to remind us not only of our mortality, but as a sort of check in time; a time to ask just how am I doing in the turn the other cheek department?

How goes my resentments and justified angers, my love of looking down my nose at this gal or that guy.... in short, am I a little better this year than last at letting others feed me, or am I still intent on just feeding myself alone?

It is our journey of moving from tight to light....

You know what that's like.

When we get on our high horse or feel the need to retaliate or stay mad, teeth get clenched, fists get formed and stomachs are usually churning...

We feel tight.

But Jesus calls us to become light...to surrender all the stuff that makes us want to fight, whether its money or pride or ego or fear...and once we release it, the stomach calms down, a smile replaces grinding molars, and fists become hands open for the shaking....

This is the journey of our faith, this is our destiny, this is our hope.

+amen

