

Ash Wednesday

All Years

Joel 2:1-2,12-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Psalm 103 or 103:8-14

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

There is something very special about this day in the Christian calendar. It is compelling. It calls to many who normally attend church every Sunday, as well as those who may never come into a church. Perhaps it is because Ash Wednesday reminds of our mortality, and our place as the beloved of God. We were formed from the primordial soil, given life through the very breath of God, and then salvation through God's son. It reminds us of the patterns and cycle of life. We are born, we do the best we can, and then life as we know it ends.

The prophet Joel, even in the middle of his apocalyptic message of invading armies and darkness, remind us that if we return to God seeking forgiveness, we will have nothing to fear. God sends His angels to watch over us, and keep us safe, clothed and fed. But our price is to seek his forgiveness, to always try to care for His creation, and to turn away from evil.

You would think that would be a no brainer. There is a saying in some twelve step programs, that what we must do is simple, but not easy. Be loving toward your neighbor, generous and humble. Don't store up treasures on earth, where things can be stolen, they rust, they go away. In today's terms, things become obsolete. That special phone, or computer, or software is worthless almost before the credit card bill comes via email!

We are called to repent; to turn away from our sins of selfishness and greed, of meanness, of rejection of those we should love. Repentance is beyond apologizing, it means not doing something again. If we are in the habit of saying things that are critical of another, whether our spouse, or child, or an acquaintance, we are called to stop. Not continue in the old way, but find a new way of speaking that is filled with love. If you are trying to drive from here to Detroit, and you head out on I96 west, you will never get there. It doesn't matter if you stop at a rest area, or pull over to side of the road and apologize. Chances are you will find Chicago, not Detroit, unless you actually turn around. We have to change what we do, in order to move closer to our goal of being better servants of Christ.

Last Saturday, three of us from Trinity attended the Bishop's workshop. Besides learning more about Bishop Hougland's call to be the Bishop Provisional of the Diocese of Eastern Michigan, we learned much more about the energy behind a call, particularly this one. We heard an eloquent description of heaven.

In his address to us, Bishop Hougland spoke of our understanding of life after death. Of how we become reunited with those we love who have moved on to that new life. And we are reminded of how there are no more tears. No pain. How Jesus gave himself to make the way plain for us to follow him to that place where he has prepared a place for us.

The imposition of ashes reminds us not just of our mortality, but because the ashes are in the sign of the cross, we are reminded that despite our mortality, our savior Christ has intervened on our behalf. We are on a path of reconciliation and forgiveness. Turn around, embrace Jesus and let him lead you. Reach out to the stranger, the friend, those you are separated from because of misunderstanding, and embrace them. Look at what you have done to cause the rift, and change your own behavior. I love that saying, remove the log from your own eye before trying to take the splinter from your neighbor's.

Take this time to fast and pray for the leadership of our country, for healing of the divisiveness. To invite those whom we don't agree with to speak, and then listen. It is a time for all of us to listen, to find our way back to the dialogue that has always been the way our country has made decisions. It is a time when we need to be welcoming of those who are not welcome in other places of worship. A time when we need to be patient with each other, and grateful for the gifts others give.

Instead of giving up something for Lent, consider taking on something. Some discipline, like fasting and giving the money you would have spent to the food pantry. Or, take the time to visit someone who cannot get out as easily as they once could. Volunteer at the food bank or local shelter. Spend some time in prayer, Bible study, or meditation.

This Lent, we are going to try some new, and some old things here at Trinity. Wednesday evenings starting next week at 5:30, we will have an evening service called Vespers. It will include evening prayer and Holy Eucharist. There will be opportunities for members of the congregation to try their hand at giving short sermons and leading the service. There will be a light supper, and an adult forum.

We will be exploring what it means to be a Christian through a discussion of the Baptismal Covenant, a little history of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican traditions, and scripture as we move through Lent.

Anyone who wishes to prepare for baptism, or reception into the Episcopal Church, or is simply interested in deeper exploration of what it means to be a Christian, are welcome.

We will meet for Vespers at 5:30 here in the church, then enjoy a potluck soup supper. Please join us with a little food to share, and your curiosity.