

ASH WEDNESDAY REFLECTION – February 26, 2020

“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

What does it feel like to be called “dust”? These words from Genesis describe the creation of mankind: “Then the Lord God formed the human of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Gen 2:7) We come to life as some kind of combination of the “stuff” of earth and the breath of God.

And God loves it. Us. What the Creator has made out of the dust of the earth.

Far from making us worth less, God sees our frame, remembers we are dust (Psalm 103:14) and LOVES us. Delights in us. Desires us. **God entered the world in one of our own dusty bodies and incarnated that love for us in real time.**

DO WE BELIEVE IT?

"Do you know what the Holy One can do with dust?"

We spend our whole lives being told we are not OK just the way we are.

Have you ever been told that you were too short or too tall or too fat or too skinny? That you were too loud or too quiet too long-winded or too terse?

That you would be OK, welcomed, loved, invited into the circle
---once you *changed* something.

Perhaps you've been told –either directly or subtly, that once you denied your **true self** and jumped in to the mainstream, ***then*** all would be fine-- even though that meant going against your own soul.

THE CROSS

The Cross of ashes puts a mark on our forehead just like The cross of water at our Baptism and at our Renewal of Baptism puts a mark on our forehead by Creator God.

This mark is the Cross of Christ as we begin our Lenten journey into the wilderness—that time of wandering, wondering, temptation, struggle, even battle with dark forces within and without ourselves. That time and space of having our very being threatened and trashed.

It's really too bad we can't keep it—that lovely, dusty, ashy Cross— on there all throughout Lent— Not as a sign of piety or an announcement to the world: “Hey, we are religious types!
But, keep it there, in broad daylight, as a ***Birthmark*** of our identity as part

of the body of Christ! And, proof that we are seen through **Christ's** eyes--*a/ways* loved accepted for **who we are** deep in our core.

And, that cross on our forehead is a visible sign to remind everyone we meet to look at **us** through the eyes of Christ and a reminder for ourselves when we look in the **mirror** to look at our own beings through the eyes and the heart and the love of Christ.

And, as important! To look at **one another** through the eyes and heart of Christ—in every encounter.

“The Christ in me greets the Christ in you”

The Celts had a way of saying and greeting one another that is simple yet profound.

"What seems at first an awful loss—'remember that you are dust'—becomes a gift. Lent offers us the gift of our mortality. The gift of our limitation. We are invited to find the end of ourselves and, in so doing, to find the endlessness of Christ. Lent turns us inside-out for the sake of **others.**" - Kolby Kerr

BE DIFFERENT

So, let this Ash Wednesday be different. Let this Lenten journey moving on towards Easter, be different from *anything* we've known in the past.

Remember that you are dust and dust you shall return

Remember that God became dust to walk this earth and journey with us in Christ.

When you receive this ash on your forehead or your hand, you receive your **true identity** as a beloved child of God; member of the Body of Christ. Loved, accepted, known for who you are in the depths of your soul.

And as you go out from this place let the Cross remind you to look at one another with those same eyes and heart and look at yourself in the mirror every day during Lent and say these words to yourself and one another:

“You are dust and you are Beloved just as you are!”

BLESSING THE DUST

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking

we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

—Jan Richardson
from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*