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--
always 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