

sacred space

“I close my eyes, only for a moment and the moment's gone. All my dreams, pass before my eyes, a curiosity. Dust in the wind, all they are is dust in the wind.” [Dust in the Wind” by Kansas, 1978]

As a Christian I don't share the hollow despair of “Dust in the Wind,” yet I am moved by its profound statement of what life without hope would be like. “Dust in the Wind” doesn't proclaim the Christian gospel, but it does sum up the bad news that prepares us to hear the good news of what God has done in Christ. Apart from Jesus, “all we are is dust in the wind.”

On **ASH WEDNESDAY** we remember that we are dust [Psalm 103:14]. Of course we also remember that we are far more than merely dust. But Ash Wednesday gives us a chance to focus on our “dustiness,” if you will. It's a day to remember the bad news of who we are apart from Christ so that we can begin to prepare for the great news of Good Friday and Easter.

Ash Wednesday is a Christian holiday (holy day) that is not required in Scripture. So it's nothing that all Christians must recognize. However, the day has been set apart by Christians for over a thousand years. It is the first day of Lent, a forty-day season of preparation for Holy Week and Easter. For centuries Christians have had ashes placed on their foreheads in the shape of a cross. The ashes remind us of our mortality. As they are being “imposed” on our foreheads we hear the bad news from Genesis 3:19: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Yet, because the ashes are imposed in the shape of the cross, they also suggest the hope of Easter that is yet to come, that which will deliver us from eternal death.

Some church members complain that Ash Wednesday service is “a real downer.” To be sure it is not joyous in the way most worship services are. Yet Ash Wednesday is our recognition that apart from God we are indeed “dust in the wind.” Yet into this dust God breathed, not only the breath of earthly life, but also the breath of his Spirit. Thus Ash Wednesday's vivid reminder of our mortality leads us, not to despair, but to hope. It points not to defeat, but to the coming victory of Easter. Ash Wednesday is the beginning, not the end.



Sermon Notes

“To be rather than to seem”

“Worship lifts us up to see the problems and troubles we face from God's perspective instead of being trapped in an earthly, time-bound viewpoint. The higher we go, the smaller our problems seem.” Tenny

Worship = Mountaintop

➤ The Mountain is a decision point in life

“There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” v2

So What? – Jesus is much more than a prophet or teacher

Now What? – We should fall face down, terrified in His Holiness.

➤ The Mountain is often shrouded in mystery

“a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” v5

To encounter God is to tread on unknown territory.

➤ Mountain is the ultimate temptation

“Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” v5

Temptation of Worship: We have Arrived! We've figured it out!

➤ The Mountain changes the landscape

“They kept ... discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.” v10

So What – Now What?

Mark 9:2-10

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.