

Sermon for March 5, 2014 Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
and the Holy Spirit. Amen

This evening begins the **holy season** of Lent. It is the 40 days of the church year when we **intentionally reorient** ourselves, we **face** the cross, and we **journey** with Jesus as he moves ever closer to death-a death which he **did not** deserve.

The other day I was **praying** about what to preach on this evening as we receive the ashes on our foreheads and hear the words, “*remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return*”. I was thinking about **just what it means** to remember where we came from and the **place** which we are all destined to return as well as how our lives are **transformed** not only by those words but by what Jesus did for us by his **death** on the cross, by his **resurrection** from the grave, and by his **ascension** into heaven. The fact that because of Jesus’ **very act** of self sacrifice we have received redemption and salvation from the grave is an **awesome** thing to contemplate.

This Lenten season on Sundays I am going to be using a preaching series called, “*Restored in Christ*”. It is a weekly series which focuses on how we as broken and sinful people are restored to life by the one who was **without** sin, how we are restored to life by the one who came to this earth for the **sole purpose** of saving us all, and how we are restored to life by a **God who loves us** more than we could ever imagine. The topics are: *broken vessels, broken bread, broken promises, broken justice, and broken hearts.* Through these topics we will hear about how even though we are broken the one who **dies** for our sins **is also** the one who can-*and does*-**save us** from all this brokenness.

This evening in our first reading from Joel we heard the Lord tell us to **return** to Him with all our heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. To **return** to the Lord our God because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. How **wonderful** is our God who sent His one and only Son to die for us. How **great** is He to those of us who have turned our face from Him, to those of us who sin against Him time after time, and to those of us who chose to not know him.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he calls us to be **reconciled**—adapted, reunited, adjusted, and harmonized—with God knowing full well that as servants

of God we will have **hardships** along the way; and yet, when **all** is said and done we will possess **everything** because of what Jesus Christ has done for us through His death on the cross. Although, it is **God's saving power** which is at work through the presence of the Spirit which **empowers** us to press on with a character grounded in *sincerity, wisdom, patience, generosity, and truthfulness*. These are what our **right relationships** with God, with others, and with ourselves are to be based upon. *This is what the Lenten season is about.*

During these **40 days** we will focus our attention on and remember that Jesus, *the one without sin*, was the one who bore all the sin of the world on the cross. Jesus, *the one who embodies sin* though sin was **not** a part of his life, has come to save us all so we can '*become the righteousness of God*'. In this righteousness we can **share** in God's faithfulness and God's consistency which is **ours** for the taking. Such righteousness and salvation is not only fixed toward some point we can look to in the **future** but it is evident in our lives today as the old has passed away and **everything**, through Jesus Christ, has become new. *But this will not come without a cost. Tonight* is the beginning of that journey.

I pray that as you make your own Lenten journey you will **remember** the words said over you this evening, '*remember that you are dust, and to dust you*

shall return'. **Humbling** words to be sure. I pray also that you will **reimagine** your walk with Jesus, that you will **reflect** upon your relationship with Him, that you will **rethink** what it means to be a child of God, and that you will **reconnect** with a God who loves you so much He sent His **one and only son** to die for you—for **each and every** one of you.

Lent is a time when we **strip away** all of the frills and get at the **basics** of what it means to be a Christian. In this season we are called to **rediscover** who we are as God's people. To face our own fears and failures with courage and dignity, fully relying on God's love and mercy for us. The sign of the cross that we **wear** on our foreheads tonight is not there only one day a year. It is the **same** cross that is placed on our foreheads in our baptism. We show it once a year to **remind** ourselves that we belong to God, to **remind** ourselves that we die daily to sin, and to **remind** ourselves that Jesus' resurrection is our future. **Someday** we will return to dust, but God is **not finished** with us yet, we will **live on** for now. During this Lenten season let us be **reminded** of the promise of God's relationship with each of us in this time of **reimaging, reflecting, rethinking,** and **reconnecting** with a God who loves us so much he sent His **one and only Son** to die a painful, humiliating death on a cross for us all. **AMEN**

