

Ash Wednesday During The Pandemic



Ash Wednesday begins the Season of Lent with its emphasis on self-examination, renewal and intentional entering into the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Interestingly, the Gospels do not mention Ash Wednesday or the custom of Lenten observances. However, the practice of repentance and mourning in ashes is found in:

2 Samuel 13:19, as well as Esther 4:1, Job 2:8 and Daniel 9:3

Thinking back to 2020, that may have been one of the last worship experiences we shared together as we ate pancakes and received ashes from the Palms of 2019.

This year for the first time since I can remember, congregations of many denominations are scrambling to celebrate Ash Wednesday in the safest way possible during this Covid-19 crisis.

I wish we could do a "drive by" ash dispensation where we could offer a small container of ashes, along with a blessing and the Ash Wednesday liturgy to be used at home. Or even a small outdoor service, weather permitting, with individual packages of ashes to be self-administered collectively during the service, or at home. Unfortunately, gatherings are still prohibited in Red Zones.

So, what can we do under these trying circumstances? I have been scratching my head for days and, fortunately, with the participation of fellow DLMs we have found worship resources on-line for just such times. Not the ashes of repentance we are used to, but perhaps the possibility of making the sign of the cross with the residue from a candle, the end of a burnt cork (thinking of the Halloween makeup of my childhood), or even a cut-out paper cross to stick on the forehead.

The self-marking of the sign of the cross, while remembering we come from dust and will return to dust, might have new theological insights this year during this pandemic as we are reminded of the mortality and the unpredictability of the future all around us.

So, this year, as one or as a family, safe at home, the following prayer is offered:

***Creator God,
There is a rumbling in us that won't let go.
It stirs in us like the wind stirs leaves—inviting us to move, drawing us forth.
When we're quiet, we know that rumble is the Holy Spirit, Dancing love
awake in us.
So we're here. And we're still. And we're quiet.
And on this first day of Lent, we're asking you to draw near.
As we hear your scripture read aloud, open the door for us to move.
Invite us in. Rumble us awake. Gratefully we pray, Amen***

Scripture: Genesis 3:19 “From dust you came, and to dust you shall return.

Now, if you are ready, you may mark yourself with the sign of the cross.

**Closing Prayer
Lord, let everything we do this day
and in this season of Lent
comes from you and be inspired by you
Amen**

Credit:

This service was adapted from the words of Rev. Sarah Are, Woodstock Presbyterian Church from:
"Again and Again We're Invited In" – an adapted home liturgy for Ash Wednesday,