

Ash Wednesday 2021
Psalm 103, Ephesians 5:8-17
Let's Walk Into the Light
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As you may have read in the Informer, this year we are going to embrace the Lenten season as a title of the year, 40 days, 10% of the year that we will give, very intentionally to God. We'll be asking the questions: Who is God calling us to be as individuals and a congregation?

What gifts can we gather together as we head toward resurrection ó the resurrection of Christ, the church, and our world post-pandemic?

What can we give to God ó on our own and as a family of faith?

What can we give to the world around us?

We will bathe this Lenten season in prayer and reflection as we seek to answer these questions and give our best to God. Along the way, we may learn that there are some things we have to let go of to live into who God is calling us to be. What we give up for Lent this year may be a permanent letting go.

But, as always, the Lenten season begins today, Ash Wednesday, when we acknowledge our own mortality and our utter dependence on God for grace, and guidance, and vision and direction. And so we gather to begin. (PAUSE)

There is a story about a small town in Guatemala. Years ago, they were resistant to electricity coming to their town. Finally, the town's wealthiest family paid for the line to be brought in to the village, and then to their home. Then they invited the whole town over for the unveiling. It was just after sundown, the house was packed, and everyone waited expectantly. On cue, they all counted down together 3í 2í 1í and there it was-- electric light ---for the first time ever. "WOW," they all exclaimed as they looked up in wonder. But then, their expressions of awe and wonder turned to disgust. The home that had seemed so warm and inviting by lantern light, was revealed to be dirty. For the first time, the nooks and crannies that had never seen the natural light of day were exposed, and they were full of dust and cobwebs. The family had cleaned by daylight, but that light had never penetrated the corners that had remained in darkness. All of a sudden the family was ashamed, their dirt had been exposed for all to see.

The townspeople were embarrassed for their hosts, and the party quickly broke up. And as the townspeople went to their own, dimly lit cottages, they decided not to invite the light in to their homes. They decided to live as they had been living, they chose to live with reality as they had known it. They didn't want to know what the light would reveal in their own homes and lives. They chose to continue to live in darkness.

(PAUSE)

Friends, Christ, the light of the world has come. And his light reveals what has been around us all along in our own hearts, and in the world around us. Some of us knew what dust and cobwebs lurked in the dark, and the light of Christ confirmed what we already knew, but often chose not to see. Others of us are shocked by what we see when our worlds are illuminated, we may be ashamed when the light penetrates the darkness, and we don't know how to respond at first.

The truth is that no matter where we find ourselves at the beginning of this Lenten season, we can only move forward when the truth is unveiled. As we heard from Ephesians just a moment ago. "For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light." Did you hear that in our hearts, we are the light. "So live as children of light," Paul writes, "for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The first step in walking into the light is cleaning out what the darkness has revealed. So friends, let us confess our sins together.

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.

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

