

ASH WEDNESDAY
2023



Prayer Walk

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22
ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

REMEMBER YOU ARE *but dust*

AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.

LENT IS A TIME WHEN WE, AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES, REMEMBER WHO WE ARE; CREATURES WITH A MORTAL BODY, WHO ARE LIVING IN A WORLD WHICH IS ALSO LIMITED BY TIME AND MORTALITY, BUT CALLED TO A PILGRIMAGE, FOLLOWING JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED BUT RAISED BEYOND THIS EARTH TO ETERNAL LIFE. THE WORDS USED WHEN WE ARE MARKED WITH ASHES (OFTEN FROM THE PALM CROSSES OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR) REMIND US OF THIS CALLING AND OUR LENTEN PILGRIMAGE.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. ...Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so.....And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years... And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1. 1-3,9-11,14, 18b

Look around. Look at the ground on which you are standing; look at trees and plants; look at the stones that have been used for buildings; look up at the sky where you can see stars if it is dark, or if it is day time, know that the stars are there but the light of the sun is too great for them to be seen. And remember that the whole universe is created from the same atoms and molecules and dust: stars, plants, mountains, plants – and each one of us.

Lord God, from the great swirl of atoms and planets

You made the earth we stand on.

You brought life from darkness

You made us from the very dust of the ground

We remember that we are dust

We thank you for creation; We praise you for life.



REMEMBER YOU ARE *but dust*

AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.

L12 FOR YOU YOURSELF CREATED
MY INMOST PARTS; ♦
YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY
MOTHER'S WOMB.

13 I THANK YOU, FOR I AM
FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY
MADE; ♦
MARVELLOUS ARE YOUR WORKS,
MY SOUL KNOWS WELL.

FROM PSALM 139

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed a human being (Adam) from the dust (adamah) of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the human whom he had formed.

Genesis 2:4b-9

(In Hebrew adamah means “from dust” and the creature created by ‘God is “adam” which means a human. Read the passage again, thinking about these words)

Take your eyes from the skies and look at the tiny details of the world around you. If you are outside look at the veins on a leaf, the texture of tree bark, the difference between each brick or stone of a building...and anything else that helps you to wonder at the variety of creation, all created by God and loved and blessed as good. Then look at your hands; stand with you feet on the ground, or sit firmly in a chair and give thanks that God created you as you are.



*Lord God, in the beginning God made us
From the clay and dust upon the earth
God has made me from love and for love
We remember that we are dust
We remember that we are loved
We thank you for creation;
We praise you for life
We receive your love*

REMEMBER YOU ARE *but dust*

AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.

VERY TRULY, I TELL YOU, UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS JUST A SINGLE GRAIN; BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT. THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR LIFE LOSE IT, AND THOSE WHO HATE THEIR LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL KEEP IT FOR ETERNAL LIFE.

JOHN 12. 24-25

Find some soil, a pot of compost for a plant. If it is in a garden or a park, wood etc, look at all the dead leaves, plants, twigs which are part of the soil, and gradually breaking down to make it good to grow new plants. Our world depends on everything that has lived becoming dust and a fertile place for new life to grow.

If we can, we'll clear some weeds, or even plant something, or sow some seeds. We can watch it grow during Lent, a reminder of the new life that grows from the soil and dust that is needed for it to be grow good roots.

What do you want or need to grow good roots?
How might you help those roots to grow this Lent?

*Lord God, you have made us for love and for life
Mother God, you have tended us,
you help us grow into people who receive and give love
We remember that we are dust
We remember that we are loved
We thank you for creation; We praise you for life
We receive your love*



Ephesians 3. 15-17

REMEMBER YOU ARE *but dust*

AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.

CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O
GOD,
AND PUT A NEW AND RIGHT SPIRIT
WITHIN ME.

DO NOT CAST ME AWAY FROM
YOUR PRESENCE,
AND DO NOT TAKE YOUR HOLY
SPIRIT FROM ME.

RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR
SALVATION,
AND SUSTAIN IN ME A WILLING
SPIRIT.

FROM PSALM 51

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many
generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Isaiah 58.6-12

As we enter the season of Lent, we desire to follow Jesus, to grow in discipleship and in faith. It is not just personal sins we repent of, but also a recognition that being human means to be imperfect.

To be part of a community is to be part of a community that is not perfect. After planting seeds or touching the dust or compost or earth, you will need to wash your hands. This washing is a sign of our sorrow for sins and mistakes and God's promise to wash away and forgive our sins.



*Holy God,
Our lives are laid bare before you:
Rescue us from the chaos of sin
and through the death of your Son
Bring us healing and make us whole
In Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen*



WRITING IN THE DUST

ROWAN WILLIAMS WAS IN NEW YORK THE DAY THE TWIN TOWERS WERE ATTACKED AND WROTE A SHORT BOOK REFLECTING ON THIS EVENT WHICH IS CALLED "WRITING IN THE DUST". THIS IS HOW HE ENDS THE BOOK:

'But lastly, another picture from the Gospel of John evoked for me by all this, from the stray story of Jesus and the women taken in adultery that is preserved, improbably, in John 8. When the accusation is made, Jesus at first makes no reply but writes with his finger on the ground. What on earth is he doing?

Commentators have had plenty of suggestions, but there is one meaning that seems to me obvious in the light of what I think we learned that morning (11th Sep 2001). He hesitates. He does not draw a line, fix an interpretation, tell the woman who she is and what her fate should be. He allows a moment, in which people are given time to see themselves differently precisely because he refuses to make the sense they want.

When he lifts his head there is both judgement and release. So this is writing in the dust because it tries to hold that moment for a little longer, long enough for some of our demons to walk away'

~ The Most Rev. Primate Rowan Williams

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am Holy Eucharist
10am Holy Eucharist with choir & children's time

LENTEN FORMATION

Exploring Sabbath as Resistance
Sundays, 7:30pm
Wednesdays, 12:30pm

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Palm Sunday, April 2 - 8am & 10am
Maundy Thursday, April 6 - 7pm
Good Friday, April 7 - 12noon, 7pm

EASTER SERVICES

Easter Vigil, Saturday, April 8 - 7pm
Easter Sunday, April 9 - 8am & 10am

With gratitude to the Rev. Stephanie Hunter

Collect for Ash Wednesday: Janet Morley 'All Desires Known'
Responses adapted from "Creativity" Moot Community
Little Services Pocket Liturgy 2009

"Writing in the dust" Rowan Williams Hodder and Stoughton 2002

Lent and
HOLY WEEK

2025



St. Mark's Church

1 Porter Road
East Longmeadow, MA 01028
(413) 641-7812
office@stmarksma.org