

Ash Wednesday Reflection 2021

The Committal in a Service of Witness to the Resurrection ends with these words:

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother or sister, and we commit their body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

And, I look each person straight in the eye who comes forward at the Ash Wednesday service to receive ashes on their forehead, to remind them of their earthly death sentence, saying:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

This year, perhaps more than others, these two liturgical pronouncements feel interconnected. We've had hard losses of dear people in this year in our community of faith, some of them after a long decline and some of them too suddenly. We've had hard losses that we are still grieving from previous years, too. The cost of loving deeply has been felt in these losses. And our country and world has had losses, as the Covid-19 death count ticks up each day, and as other diseases continue to take lives. These are just the losses of human life. When we consider all the other arenas of loss, this has been a very hard, overwhelming year.

Today, Ash Wednesday, is a day to sit with these losses. It's not a day to mope, or to spiral into despair, or to refuse to get out of bed. It's a day to recognize the reality of our humanity. We sin. We die. We decay, in every way.

None of us can change the course of earthly death. None of us can be fully sanctified, or sinless, in this life. None of us can outwit or outrun or lock out the decline every human being is destined to experience. But this truth is not meant to cause us to give up and quit. This truth is meant to draw us into the Way, the Truth, and the Life – to draw us to the person of Jesus. Jesus is the only human being who *did* outrun sin, who *did* lock out death, and who *did* outwit the author of evil. By turning humbly to our Savior, we stand in the shadow of the one who defeated death, and who extended that gift to us in eternity.

On this Ash Wednesday, I invite you not to grieve, but to confess your gratitude for the lives of others who have died, for the lives of loved ones who are present-day gifts, and for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus who keeps and claims your life for all eternity. In humble receipt of the gift of Jesus, we remember we are dust, but we do not fear, because God holds us.

I will be offering a Zoom Prayer and Reflection time at 7 pm tonight (Wednesday, February 17). To participate, join with this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89211746446?pwd=Mj9KbWNRUIBXV3R0a2syMlZDN1hadz09>

May this day be a beginning to a Lent where we listen for God's on-going work in our lives, as people of God gathered in community at The Old Scotch Church.

Grace and peace,

Tracie