

Pastor Roy's sermon from Ash Wednesday Service - Feb. 18, 2015

Ashes. Ashes are the stuff of life in a very simple form. Burnt, broken down--after all that hard work of being human, or a deer, or rabbit, or insect, or a tree, or grass. Ashes are what we are. They remind us of that of which we are made. Ashes are simple. They don't make demands or excuses, they don't worry. They don't require climate control. They do, however, blow away pretty easily in the wind.

We forget that we are ashen dust. We worry about many, many things. We try to control our destiny. We have very complicated thoughts and emotions. Whether we admit it or not, we are constantly working the numbers in our heads, maximizing the returns for our many non-financial investments.

Ashes remind us that all of our attempts to be in control are foolishness. The walls of our minds don't make us more human or faithful. We worry about many things. We worry about what God thinks about us and perhaps mostly worry about what we think of ourselves. Are we good enough? Are we acceptable? Do we work hard enough?

The ashes are God's call to live simply, like the living ashen dust that we are. We might react that being dust is a put-down. But confessing our dustiness actually can set us free to be whom God has truly made us to be. As easily as a tree is a tree, or a bird is a bird, or a rock is a rock. We are not called to be something we are not, but to freely embrace what we are: creatures beloved of God. Fallible? Yes. Naturally centered in ourselves? What creature is not? It's really ok.

Perhaps during this year's observance of Lent we can simply focus on being with God, with ourselves, rather than on all the things we need to do or be--to get a hold of God's blessing. For the starting point with the ashes, as with baptism, is the creator's blessing. Ash/dust is a sign of blessing. The gift of freedom. The gift of grace. The gift of you. The gift of us.

Now for a post script. On Wednesday nights we will be studying a book that suggests that we can find new inroads to God's mercy and presence by making room, by clearing out some of the clutter, by eliminating some distractions from living in the presence of God. So during this next week, I challenge you to give up looking in the mirror. No, it's not easy, but yes, it can free us to imagine ourselves besides what our skin and hair look like.

So in summary, the ashes are a sign of God's blessing and love for us.

And--this Lent, may we all find grace to clear aside some of the clutter that distracts us from enjoying the freedom of God's abundance. Amen.