

### Pastor Roy's Ash Wednesday Sermon - March 1, 2017

"Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This humble declaration reveals the simplicity and unity of life. Some might take our dust status as insulting. The reality is that science agrees with the assessment. Our bodies are made of the same elements that we find all around us in the dirt. Moving beyond dirt, based on our genetic material made of DNA it is most likely that all of the living look back to the same ancestor 1.6 billion years ago. For example, one quarter of our genetic makeup is the same as that of rice. More than half of our genetic makeup is the same as that of the fruit fly. 90% of our genetic makeup is the same as the mouse. We share 96% with non-African apes and 98% with African apes.

We have often thought of ourselves as being unique or perhaps, God's favorites on this planet. Not far behind that idea is the thought that God's particular favorites are Christians. Sometimes our theology has leaned in that direction because we tend to think that our own particular ways are best because they feel so right to us. Our minds sometimes tell us that we are better than the others, whoever the others might be. And yet sometimes our minds tell us that we are not as good as the others, whoever the others might be. Funny, we think too highly of ourselves **and** too lowly of ourselves.

And here comes our tradition, saying, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Lest we think we are better than the others, lest we think we are worse. Perhaps Lent is a time to take stock of who we are, with honesty. A time to be humbled. A time to be uplifted. We are among friendly strangers. When we get to worrying that there will not be enough, when we fret that we are not close enough to the top, when we fear losing this game, when we are just downright uncertain about everything, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

No, this is not a put down. This is a point of rest, a point of communion, a point of faith-filled hope.

Our minds play tricks on us and convince us that we *should* be this and that, thus and so. So many expectations, so many demands, so much head work. What about the rest of our bodies? What about all our beauty and glory which just is, regardless what our well-intentioned heads say?

Ash Wednesday is a day of freedom. A day for God's holy embrace of who you truly are, not what your head says you are. It is a day to rest, to set aside the expectations, the demands and to listen to God's message of peace and healing. Yes, healing. Receive this oil as a sign of grace and healing in Jesus Christ. Feel the embrace of God who loves you just as you are, just like the dirt, the tree, the fruit fly, the dog, and the mouse. The universe is telling the story of God's mercy and peace, and we are part of that story. May we embrace our true place, our true self, and let go of everything else. Amen.