

Ash Wednesday, 2018

Readings:

- Isaiah 58:1-12
- Psalm 103:8-14
- 2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10
- Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

I REALLY like Lent.

It is a time of pageantry in the church year,

- Special purple vestments; somber artwork and music; special three days of liturgies leading to Easter
- I got quite snarky in a church history class about changes to this church season during 16th Century reformations under certain British monarchs
 - When all six special Lent & Easter services were dropped from the prayer books except for Ash Wed.
 - And even then, using ashes was optional!!
 - Realized it upset me because I need to experience repentance and grace and forgiveness in my body
 - Feeling the gritty ashes;
 - or the texture of clay crosses in my hand;
 - mourning with the spoken laments,
 - recognizing that the Good Shepherd icon has been hidden;
 - seeing other icons framed with purple cloths;
 - rejoicing as the single paschal candle is carried into a dark church at Easter
 - Ours is a tactile faith
 - Jesus is the embodiment of divine love
 - Lent is a time when what we see, the music we hear, the words we say all ask us to dive deep

This is a Season of quietness when we are invited to go into the abyss, the hidden places of our hearts, the scary places

- Think of how Jesus ‘set his face for Jerusalem’
 - Surely, surely he knew what would happen there...

- In contrast with the Transfiguration, last Sunday, a glorious, light filled experience which (as Phil preached about) prepares us for the hard times ahead
 - Indeed, after the wondrous mountain top Jesus is mobbed by people demanding healing as soon as he gets into the valley
- Isaiah relays God's challenge to express our faith very directly; to 'put our money where our mouth is'
 - To recognize that right relationship with the Holy One is impossible when
 - we oppress workers or benefit from economic injustice
 - Or we cut ourselves & our resources off from those who are hungry, homeless & in need
 - Ours is a tactile faith.
- In Matthew's Gospel, we are challenged to prioritize our relationship with the Holy One out of sight of other people
 - Instead of making sure that other people know all the good things we've done or the gifts we've given

Today we will be invited to the observance of a holy Lent

- Suggestions include self-examination; giving something up; adding prayer, reading, other spiritual practices
- I encourage you to ask yourself: what will draw me closer to the Holy One?
 - It's not about powering through some arduous time of deprivation on self-will
 - Or adding a trifecta of "perfect disciplines, perfectly observed"
- It is more about considering:
 - Where is grace & joy breaking into your life?
 - How can you pay more attention there?
 - Maybe quiet joy when walking – maybe with your dog – could be deepened by saying Thank You to the Holy One for a different blessing as you travel.
 - Maybe instead of scooting past every greeter after a church service, you might try talking to one about why you, or they, come to All Souls.

- Maybe it is spending some time every day with music or art that touches your heart & gives you glimpses of awe
- Where is grace & joy breaking into your life?

I am sure you've noticed that it's also Valentine's Day

- Advertising all point to romantic, sexual relationships
 - As if those were the only relationships that exist
- There is one gift that only you can give - to a romantic partner, a friend, a family member, or the Holy One:
 - Your undivided attention
 - No one else can give that
 - Only you
 - You are uniquely created in the image of the Holy One
 - You are physically composed of molecules of star dust
 - The Holy One longs for you to share that gift - with those around you
 - And especially, in this season, with God.