

“Let Go & Let God”

- I. Today we begin the Season of Lent, a 40 day period of preparation for the Feast of Easter.
- A. We have a tradition going almost all the way back to our origins of this day that we call Ash Wednesday
1. We take a phrase from the Burial Liturgy at the end of life and use it for a recognition of our present reality while we are still living.
 2. We hear the words that “*we are dust and to dust shall we return.*”
 3. The longer quote comes from God speaking to Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:19) following their original disobedience.
 - a. “*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust shall you return.*”
- B. In our modern understandings we have come to a recognition of *dust* in a way probably little imagined before.
1. Our bodies, and more than that, the whole Earth (and every element above Hydrogen in the Periodic Table) is “*star dust.*”
 2. And it is even more amazing to ponder that *star dust* is a mere **.01%** of the density of the whole universe as we know it.
 2. But *star dust* is not just refuse, it has come into existence because of something unimaginable going on in the other **99.99%** of the universe over billions and billions of years.
 4. So the dust of which we are made is the rarest material, the very top of the evolutionary chain in the universe.
 - a. We literally are more precious than gold.

C. This recognition of our *preciousness* is declared in the Baptismal Liturgy when the priest anoints the person's forehead with oil and says,

1. "*You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.*" ---

1. So we have these two paradoxical images that describe who we are side by side in today's liturgy,

a. the image of dust and the image of life that we receive in the Body of Christ at Holy Communion.

II. The combination of these two images has something profound to teach us about who we are.

A. We are both dust and life.

1. We are being asked today not to fear the dust,

a. not to fear our death,

b. not to fear the dissolution of our bodies

c. or even all of our hard won, cherished accomplishments.

2. All these are temporary and if we imagine they are permanent we will only become neurotic.

B. We come to the full and eternal life promised in Baptism as we go through the reality of a complete offering of ourselves.

1. This is the necessary door through which we pass into our inheritance with Christ, into everlasting life.

2. It seems like a completely irrational paradox.

3. But this becomes very practical in our living day to day.

a. It can become a pathway through each day and year of our life.

b. It is the practice of "*letting go*" or as you've heard people say, "*Let go and let God.*"

III. We are invited to take the symbol of ashes we offer at this service as a metaphor or practice to do for ourselves daily.

A. We can envision two piles of ashes.

1. One is our hurts.

- a. What is it about our lives that has been taken from us by others, without our consent:
 - b. hurts, \ unkind words and deeds, \ power-plays, \ withdrawals of friendship or recognition and support?
 2. That is one pile.
 3. The other pile is made of those things that have special significance for us, --
 - a. things we might offer up to God for transformation and renewal.
 - b. Maybe they are things that once had meaning and value but their day is past and they are ready for burning.
 - c. There are parts of our lives that we cling to so tightly.
 - d. If only they could be surrendered in their present form to the flames of the Holy Spirit they could be transformed into something vital for ourselves and the glory of God.
- B. So, take a little material from each pile and offer it to God and invoke God's fire to consume it.
1. Offer it up totally and completely so that only the residue of ash remains.
 2. Then mark it over your forehead as a blazing cross.
 - a. It is a reminder that whatever has not died cannot be raised.
 - b. Whatever not surrendered cannot be given anew.
 3. On this day we see that even regression, \ dissolution and disintegration may serve the holy purposes of God.

C. A Poem by Jan Richardson:

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made,
and the stars that blaze
in our bones,
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.



- Jan Richardson