

Sermon, Ash Wednesday, 2022
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In the name of God, who calls each of us beloved.

Every year on Ash Wednesday, we recognize the fragility of life. That it has a beginning and an end. That we are dust and we will return to dust.

But even without Ash Wednesday, our own mortality couldn't be more obvious right now. I don't need to go into detail about the various ways we've been reminded of it over the last few years and the last week.

The continuing pandemic.

War in Ukraine.

And just this week at St. John's we lost Claudia Murray far, far too young, and we are mourning with her family.

Each of these things remind us of the frailty of our lives here on earth.

And perhaps it may feel to you, like it does to me, that we don't need to gather for yet another reminder of our mortality.

But gather we do, and we will soon we will receive ashes on our foreheads and be reminded that we will, eventually, return to dust.

This year, in this moment in our world and our church, I want to offer that Ash Wednesday is not only about death, but that it is just as much about life. And I want to offer that Ash Wednesday is a profound invitation to love. As we face our own fragility on this holy day, a life of love beckons us, drawing us to each other, anchoring us, and sustaining us.

This Ash Wednesday, we hold fast to the love we give to others, particularly in times of pain and grief. We stand vigil with people as they suffer, and we celebrate with them in times of joy.

This Ash Wednesday, we hold fast to the love we receive *from* others, the acts and words, both large and small, that carry us through this life. We open ourselves up to receive care from our family and friends, from the natural world, from the community at St. John's, and even from people we do not know. And if we ourselves are struggling to love or to find love in our own lives, we can look to each other, to others in this community, and ask them to love us until we are ready to love in return.

This Ash Wednesday, we hold fast to the steadfast and abounding love of God. We see God's love in other people. We see it in the beauty and mystery of the natural world. And we hear of God's love in our Scriptures, including in the psalms and readings assigned on this day.

This Ash Wednesday, we can think of repentance and penitence as an invitation to turn towards love. To constantly return to following the first and greatest commandment: to love God and each other and ourselves. And we can hope to rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way doing just that. Lent is a

time to turn away from that which pulls us from love, and to turn again and always to God's limitless love for us.

This Ash Wednesday, we can look at the delicateness of life not as a reason to shrink from relationships, but as all the more reason to pursue them and deepen them. For it those relationships that will sustain us through our lives, and it is the love in them that will outlast us.

This Ash Wednesday, as I receive the ashes on my forehead and carry them with me out into the world, I will hold onto the message that I am dust and will return to dust. But to this message I will add some additional words. Words that I hope will help me remember that within my fragile life, deep love is found.

Those words, which I invite you to consider as well if you find them meaningful, are simply this:

Life is a gift, and love is the point.

Amen.