

Dust in the Wind

Ash Wednesday 2021

February 17

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

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We're more than dust in the wind. Our days have meaning as we grow deeper with God, walk closer to Christ and notice our neighbors. It's a blessed Ash Wednesday!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 [Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

It's Ash Wednesday. The day of guilt and grace when we mark our heads with the horror and hope of a cross: Jesus' cross. If these former palm branches could talk, they would tell of another life they had before this one. Palm Sunday was a day of joy and jubilation. Yet as they burned, their existence was forever changed by the flames that consumed them. Now they have a new life, with new meaning on this Ash Wednesday.

Today is a day of a reckoning not only for the palm branches but for all of us. Today we are reminded we will not live forever. Not a single one of us knows the day or time of our departure. Yet we all know that this earthly life is but brief in the ultimate span of time.

The preacher/teacher in Ecclesiastes knows everyone dies and he also decides that nothing truly satisfies. Not money, not work, not relationships. All of life is like your breath on a cold wintery day. All of life will vanish before your very eyes.

In Chapter 3:20 he writes: "All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.

In 1977, the band Kansas took those lyrics and made a top 10 Billboard hit, "Dust in the Wind." Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind.

Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Did St. Matthew get the message? He writes that today of all days, we ought not disfigure our faces, lest anyone see us. Matthew says, don't gather on the street corner and play music, like we did for noon worship, lest anyone hear us!

Hmm. What a strange yet perfect text to begin our Lenten journey with. Thank you, Matthew.

Because Matthew also reminds us on this day; all that stuff in our houses...we can't take it with us when we die. He also reminds us to go into an inner room and pray.

Recently I watched the movie, War Room. Miss Claire goes to war – but not on the battlefield we're used to thinking of. Her War Room, is her closet...where she prays! All sorts of notes and Bible verses and prayer lists are taped to the inside of that closet. Miss Claire, she talks to Jesus Christ. Yes, she argues with Jesus Christ, she even shouts her praises to the Lord, Almighty God, Jesus Christ.

When Miss Claire moves away, a new possible buyer comes to look at her house. He enters that closet, backs away, then enters again. He says, “Someone’s been praying in that closet. It’s like those prayers are baked into the walls!”

You see our lives are and aren’t dust. We are reminded on this night our earthly lives will end. God holds each one ever so gently in God’s hand. Yet we are also challenged on this night that what we do in the time we have is incredibly important.

What will God lead us to do during Lent? Where would you like to be with God at the end of Lent? *We’re more than dust in the wind. Our days have meaning as we grow ever deeper with God, walk closer to Christ and notice our neighbors.*

At the beginning of worship there was an invitation to practice Lenten disciplines. Think about it as training for your soul. Perhaps this Lent you ask God to help you pray. You find a closet. Isn’t this fantastic! If you go into your closet and pray, Matthew says you are doing God’s will!

As you dress, remember, Colossians 3:12: Put on compassion, patience, forgiveness, love and be thankful. Whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Or simply “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” from Romans 14:8.

Maybe your Lent soul training is to give a little each day to World Hunger. Pray for those who will get a goat or some chicks, or some seed to farm with the money you donate.

How will we walk with Christ this Lent? At one level the Ecclesiastes preacher teacher was right. No amount of money or material things, or relationships or success in a career will ever fulfill our deepest desire. God created us to be with God and have our deepest needs met by God.

Just the palms branches had a life before they became ashes....we too have our God given lives. Tonight with this cross, we have new life. *We’re more than dust in the wind. Our Lenten days have meaning as we grow ever deeper with God, walk closer to Christ and notice our neighbors.*

Amen