

Ash Wednesday. The day where we read to fast in secret and then we put ashes on our foreheads for all to see. Seems a bit incongruous if you ask me.

And yet, we need the reminder don't we? The reminder that we are truly dust. Dust with life breathed into us, according to Genesis 1 – the very breath of God making the dust come to life. We hear it again in the vision of Ezekiel, God breathing God's very breath into the bones and they come to life again.

For me, this is a day that my call as a Pastor comes to life and hits directly home. The personal note, is that I started my first call on Ash Wednesday and was ordained a few weeks later. More importantly, this is the day when the people come forward to receive an ash cross and be visibly reminded (for themselves) of where they come from and whose they are. For me, it's the reminder of who isn't physically with us anymore. A few years ago, I imposed ashes on a Resident at work whose husband had died two days prior. Today, I imposed ashes on an actively dying person. (pause)

From newborn babies to those over 100, this is the day we remind ourselves of our call as children of God. Our readings point to how we are to live. Our confession tells us of where we've fallen short. The prophet Joel's words invite us to return to God with a rending of our hearts. The Psalmist's prayer is that we have a new heart created in us. The prophet Isaiah reminds us of our call as the people of God, "If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted," then we are partaking of the "fast of God", the fast we are called to.

Lent is a visible reminder for us of the community we are called into; the community in which we live. We need our own dying to the ways of the world, to live the (new) life we are created to be.

Today, Ash Wednesday marks the season of death into life. We do not live in fear of death, for we know, as Christians, that death and dying do not have the last word. They never do. We do live in a world in which fear seemingly reigns supreme these days, and our hearts and souls get caught in death's fearsome trap. We know too that death leads into new life. We are called not to project our fears onto the Other, the alien, the stranger in our midst.... We are invited to look for the sparks of life, of hope, in ourselves and in one another.

We are made of the dust of the earth. We are also made of star-dust. The poet, Nikita Gill writes in "93% Stardust:" "We have calcium in our bones, iron in our veins, carbon in our

souls, and nitrogen in our brains. 93 percent stardust, with souls made of flames, we are all just stars that have people names.”

This idea has been taken up in queer communities and with queer ally communities of marking the day and the beginning of the Lenten season with Glitter+Ash. Making the sparks of life and hope easier for all to see. ...

A beautiful reminder that we were formed in relationship. Relationship with one another, Relationship with God. And while our ashes tonight are not mixed in with glitter, we are reminded of this hope, this spark, the shimmer and glimmer of light out into the world.

And we live in a broken world. A world that, as we look around ourselves, craves community and a return to relationship. The call of Lent, to fast, to pray, to practice living in community, is a call to return to the beginning. To remind ourselves and those around us of the love of God for all God's created and our part in helping to take care of it all, starting with ourselves and the circles of our communities.

We begin with ashes. We will end with hope and new light. Amen