

Ash Wednesday  
March 9, 2011  
Pastor Jerry Wahl



In the name of God our Creator Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our comforter and guide. Amen

The Christian church gathers this night to participate in an ancient and sacred ritual. To the world what happens in this place seems, out of place, peculiar, perplexing, some may say a dark mysterious ritual.

Ash Wednesday begins our 40 day journey with Christ to the cross. As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christians gathered during this season for a time of repentance and self examination. Ashes and sack cloth marked the penitent. The sun rise of Easter was in the distance, the catechumenates prepared for baptism and the baptized reflected on God being God.

The Lenten journey in my childhood emphasized sacrifice, giving up something special. With an earnest heart I would give up beets and asparagus, maybe cauliflower too. For several years I tried to give up something important like my favorite TV program with little success.

It was a time when God's people, Lutherans in particular hung their heads, talked quietly and with great angst thought deeply about their shortcomings and imperfections. Seeking a contrite heart.

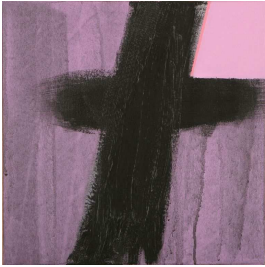
The problem is for many Lutherans lent never ended.



Tonight we wear the sign of the cross, visible in ashes on our forehead. The evening appears somber and filled with remorse.

Tonight is unsettling. In a few minutes you will be invited to participate in the imposition of ashes. Young and old will receive the sign of the cross. Our humanity is exposed. Life is not ours forever. Words are spoken, ***You are dust and to dust you shall return.***

From the moment of our first breath until the moment of our last on earth we are reminded of the temporariness of life. Of the precariousness of our existence. That we live in an uncertain and sometimes dangerous world.



This evening dust to dust is about that window of time. So brief in the millennium, like a shooting star, like a flash of lightning. We face the brevity of time. We are here but for the moment.

Lent is about this- our time and the days God grants and blesses.

I would like to suggest that Lent is about faith disciplines, fasting, prayer and alms giving and self examination. It is not so much about denying one self but about reorientation, obtaining the right perspective and focus in life, for the days pass too quickly. Our journey is about today. This time and these moments. We walk day by day.

Pastor Bruce Epperly writes "The brevity and uncertainty of life now invites us to praise, wonder, and beauty, and to seize the moment—for this is the day God has made and I will rejoice in it! All that I love and care for is mortal and transitory, but mortality is the inspiration to celebration and love. Plato once described time as the moving image of eternity. We are constantly dying, but we are also constantly living as we reflect God's vision in the world of the flesh. This day, this moment, is a "thin place," for God is with us, revealed in flesh, blood, and healing touches."



Look to the things in life that are priceless. The sound of a hearty laugh, the whisper of a mother to child, hands held on an evening walk, the joy of children growing, and the helping hand to the friend. A good meal prepared and shared. A taste of bread and wine in Jesus name. The cries of a child as the waters of baptism roll from her head.

Lent is about God being God and we are Gods people. Lent is about keeping the relationship in the right order.

May this Lenten journey be about letting God chisel away all that keeps us apart from one another and from our Saviour.

A pastor/ author writes as you undertake the disciplines of Lent, fasting, prayer and self discipline. Then



Fast from judgment, Feast on compassion

Fast from greed, Feast on sharing

Fast from scarcity, Feast on abundance

Fast from fear, Feast on peace

Fast from lies, Feast on truth

Fast from gossip, Feast on praise

Fast from anxiety, Feast on patience

Fast from evil, Feast on kindness

Fast from apathy, Feast on engagement

Fast from discontent, Feast on gratitude

Fast from noise, Feast on silence

Fast from discouragement, Feast on hope

Fast from hatred, Feast on love

From Dust we have come and to dust we share return. From first breath to last.  
We are God's.

Thanks be to God for his deep, abiding and never ending love.  
Amen.