



February 16, 2021

Dear Fellow Traveler,

Our Lenten journey begins tomorrow. The 40 days that lead to Easter commence with Ash Wednesday, a day that has been recognized by Christians for more than 1,000 years.

Ash Wednesday incorporates two interwoven themes. First, it reminds us that we are not perfect. ("Yes, we already know this, but go on"). We fall prey to self-centeredness, greed, jealousy, apathy, anger and other sins that alienate us from God and others. Lent is a time to come clean by being honest with ourselves and honest with God. We do this not so that we can mount layers of guilt upon ourselves, but because we must be willing to die to our old selves so that we can be raised to new life with Christ.

So, what is the point of ashes? For one, it hearkens back to an Old Testament ritual in which the people put on sackcloth and ashes as a symbol of repentance. Going beyond words, a person took an action that stated publicly: "I have fallen short. I want to mend my ways and live the abundant life God beckons us to live."

The second theme of Ash Wednesday, and the other reason for ashes, is to remind us of our mortality. This year, it may feel like piling on because the global pandemic has already driven home this point quite effectively.

In the book of Genesis, God said to Adam: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." As the sign of the cross is made on our foreheads and these words are spoken, it is a stark reminder that life is a fragile existence that can come to an end at any moment. This recognition ought to compel us to begin living in Christ-like ways before the sand in our hour glass drains out.

As a pastor, I experience Ash Wednesday as both intimate and sobering. Intimate, because I look into the eyes of people I love and care about and touch their foreheads. Sobering, because as I rub ashes in the shape of a cross, I know that in the coming months and years, I may officiate the person's memorial service. I rarely make it through this service without tears welling in my eyes.

However, this year will be very different. COVID-19 has slammed the door on being inches from one another's faces and touching. It is simply too risky, and I could not live with myself if I discovered that I had inadvertently contracted the virus from one person and spread it to others.

So, this year, we will not have an in-person Ash Wednesday service. In its place, I hope you will acknowledge this day in the safety of your home. Sudie, our Associate Pastor, has created a brief video focused on Ash Wednesday, and a self-led prayer service.

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Tomorrow, February 17, you can watch the Ash Wednesday video on our [YouTube channel](#) and download the service by [clicking here](#). You can also find these links on the homepage of our website (www.wpc.org) under "What's Going On?"

I pray that on Wednesday, you will pause from your routine to engage Ash Wednesday and to begin your 40 day spiritual journey that will culminate on Easter.

Love and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg".

Gregory Knox Jones
Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

P. S. If you wish to join us for in-person worship in the sanctuary this Sunday, February 21, please [click here](#) to make a reservation.