

Ash Wed 2019
Matthew 18:1-9

To see with the eyes of Jesus, we must be light.

To taste the justice of Jesus, we must be salt.

To feel with the compassion of Jesus, we must become poor.

To hear the sound of Jesus' kingdom, we must be like a little child.

To smell the sweetness of Jesus', we must breathe in the burial oil of his death.

The greatest among us, must become the least.

To know forgiveness – you must forgive.

To know love, you must love others.

If there is anything that we learn from Jesus - Jesus is all about humility. The Christ who went to suffer, die, and rise.

Humility is a challenging rarity for humanity.

Adam and Eve, wanted to be as God was – great and knowing everything. And God gave them a lesson in humility, removing them from paradise.

“Humility is a virtue all preach, none practice, & yet everybody is content to hear.” - John Selden (16th C English Scholar)

Or in the words of Anonymous - “I am the humblest person I know!”

In a world where humble is seen as weak, God chose to work through prevailing humility.

Yet today we hear the words that may bring us the greatest humility – Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

There is nothing more humbling than facing death.

- Worthless ash has a way of making a profound statement.
- Marking a cross on the forehead of a 97 year old, and the same black smudge on a 10 week old baby in the arms of mother not knowing the challenges ahead.
- Or coming to grips with our own mortality.
- I think a lot about death, but I have a weird morbid job where it is not uncommon to talk death, think death, read about death, encounter death on a daily basis.

It is good for us to meditate on mortality, in fact, there is an app for your mobile device called “WeCroak” based on a Bhutanese folk saying – to be a happy person, one must contemplate death five times daily...so 5 random times a day you get a quote or philosophy that reminds you that you will die.

Balancing grief with laughter is important, not because it is a funny topic, but because it is uncomfortably humbling. But the better relationship we have with the good and bad that comes from death, the better we are for ourselves and those we are in relationship with.

Every single funeral I have done has been a mixture of laughter and tears, because we remember the life, the joy, the precious moments, reminded of the legacy and purpose of life, and also realizing in that moment, the person is no longer there, and we won't be able to share those same joys with them, this side of glory, and tears come to our eyes.

Why can't we have that end of life perspective, during our lives?

A lot of times my encounter with death talk is work related, sometimes it is personal...thinking about my family, my mom and dad, sister – and especially my daughter and wife, and even myself.

I just turned 36, but joked with a colleague friend that I was past middle aged on the way downhill– oh, but that means you will only be 70! Yep, I replied matter of factly.

I know that in the next 10-15 years I will develop a genetically predisposed disease, called Huntington's – and likely will not make it past 70 years old. And I am at peace with it, and I look forward to returning to the dust. I also have been coping for 10 years with this knowledge – and some days are better than others, I worry and allow fear to control my thoughts and darkness, and I am not great by any stretch of anyone's imagination.

But I do think there is a healthy relationship for us to have with death, so that we can be in better relationship with others. To live a baptized life, and journey faithfully into a baptized death. To embrace the reality, to grieve and mourn the eventuality of human mortality, and receive the comforting grace of God's story of hope and resurrection. To remember that we are dust....

Remembering that the same God who took carbon to make the mountains and the moon, also chose to make you. God has made us and we are God's own. Yes, we are dust, but dust made alive for relationship molded and shaped for a purpose with all creation, to value this life and death, and life again, as gift with others, as we commune together in unit.. To see our life in relationship with other carbon creations.

Death will bring us to our knees – but God is there to restore and heal us, as our past and present and future are all wrapped up together... loved by a God who made us, saves us, and gives us life.

You started as dust...but I, your God breathed life into you. I made you saint, knowing you would be a sinner, but still I made you holy and special, I make you great in your life, nothing else and no one else. Be like a child, full of imagination of life's mystery, without reason. Be humble. You are something, but you are nothing... but carbon particles assembled together, in this precious time and place, in this moment, for a purpose to be the hands and feet,

voice and love of me, God, in the world today. And then, when your work is done, when you have finished the race, you will go back to the dust of the earth, but Do not fear, I love you, and will bring you back to myself, because the spirit that I have given you will never die.