

Ash Wednesday

Introduction:

Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance at the beginning of Lent, a season of the Church. Simply stated, Lent is a time for Christians to fast, pray, and worship as we prepare for Easter. Most notably on Ash Wednesday, many Christians are marked with ash from burnt palm leaves with the sign of the cross on their foreheads. As the ashes are imposed, we hear the words, "from dust you came, to dust you shall return." These words are a stark reminder of our mortality and our need for Jesus.

Our texts compel us to repent. The prophet Joel calls us to repent, not for the sake of feeling guilty. Rather, he calls us to repent in order that we might receive mercy, grace and love. The call to repentance is for all people from infants to elders, for brides and grooms, and even for the priests to weep and repent.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection. He also calls his disciples to take up our cross daily and follow him. As Jesus speaks these words our minds wander to the places where we have not followed, where we have been ashamed of Jesus, where we have tried to save our own lives and failed. His words cause us to examine, confess, repent and then...find hope in Jesus and Jesus alone.

Read Your Bible

- Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
- Luke 9:21-27

Apply God's Word to Your Life:

1. Have you had ashes placed upon your head? How did it feel?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word, "repentance?"
3. Have you ever made a public apology? If so, describe it.
4. What good can come from confession and repentance according to Joel?
5. When do you take up your cross well?
6. When are you ashamed of Jesus?
7. Who is a person you know, or know of, that took up their cross?
8. How can these words, which lead to confession and repentance, also inspire hope?

Reflecting on the text:

1. What have you learned about God?
2. What have you learned about the world?
3. What have you learned about yourself?

Pray

- Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.