

You've been marked. that's your story. Marked. Ashes of dust, death. Everyone. You may look good and healthy, even young, beautiful, on the outside, inwardly, the truth is quite different. A mark of death on you. The words heard today, **Dust you are, to dust you will return.** Sin means death. It means a mark. True no matter how good we try to make ourselves look on the outside; no matter how much we want others to think we're not so diseased, corrupt, dying. You've been marked with death.

The days of Joel, not unlike today. God's people given so many gifts. He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, given them a land, provided their every need -*all gift*. And they turned away from Him. They believed in themselves, more than Him. Place their ways a high priority, and well God is just an appendage to their life. God called out through Joel. **Return, turn back to me. How can you carry on, with your heart so far from me. Do you think I don't know or see what you do?**

So true. **Beware** said your Lord. Beware, you are no different than the Pharisees and people in Joel's day. **Beware.** Don't take this lightly or be fooled that in any way you are better than them. **Rend your hearts and not your garments.** Enough of hypocrisy. Enough of the outward show. Tear open your heart, that filthy, horrible, sin-diseased heart. God doesn't want danger and disaster for you.

We fall into the same trap more that any of us will admit. How we turn away from the gifts of God to something else and to ourselves. I really don't need much forgiveness because it's someone else's fault; I've a good excuse for my actions. Or thinking God's holding out on me, I need more than this Word and Sacraments. Oh, really we're just too busy to live as a Christian in daily prayers, Scripture, devotions each day, more than once a day! Come on now- certainly God will understand. And if my offering is 1 or 2% of my income and assets, He understands that too. Oh how we use the life and gifts He's called us to live? The gift of family, gift of our callings and work and resources? Be ashamed!

In Joel's day, Jesus day, our day, God calls upon His people to return to Him by consecrating a fast, your actions in these days; as a mark of sorrow, to curb your flesh; reset your priorities.

We too, surrounded by temptations not only to sin but also to apathy, to not stand-up for what is right. We are a people of unclean lips, used to getting our way, who've been taught that the customer is always right and that we just need to be true to ourselves. Thus we are quick to feel insults against us, to take offense, to be annoyed with others and to think the world is filled with stupid people. We are good at nursing grudges and gossiping. We really do not want to forgive those who have wronged us; we love making excuses for our actions. All these, just make us more vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Yet, you are not a victim. You even make His work easy, give in so easy to temptations, whatever whims of your flesh, to your wants, your ways, above others -even above God's Word. We need to rend our hearts. Rend, to be in His will.

So today, let us consecrate a fast. Wear ashes. Dare to search your hearts. Life should not be easy for you in your struggles against the world, against your own flesh. Especially in Lent. God give you the power to amend, to change, to fight your sinful ways, to bear the fruit of hearts rend by His Word.

The Lord relents to show His love in the sacrifice on Good Friday; this steadfast love of the Lord in His crucifixion. Like Israel, we bring nothing but sin, dust, and death to our Lord and in return He gives you forgiveness, life.

Joel foretells this blessed reversal. **Behold, I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied.** You, marked for death, are marked for life. The anointing of oil -marked in baptism, the mark of Christ, His life. The grain, drink offering fulfilled in the Holy Supper of His body and blood. You are marked for life. A righteousness which isn't yours, but given you, **the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

Now. The time to fast, for you to turn -turn to the sin-conquering gifts of Jesus. To receive again from Him all that He has to give. That as you live in this world of temptations, your desires of your flesh, of sin and death, marked for death, but even more, marked by Him with His life, marked with His cross, marked with His forgiveness. **And you will be satisfied.**