

Ash Wednesday
St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
February 14, 2018
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Ashes

"Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

God speaks of Ashes and Sackcloth in Isaiah...

Ashes-Symbol of Death

Ashes- What remains when biological things are burned.

Ashes- Not much is left after a big tree or a house is reduced to ashes.

Ashes- Ashes and dust- seemingly inconsequential basic biological building blocks-the dust from dried earth, the dust from organic things slowly decaying...the dust from which we were formed by God and to which we are bound to return.

Ashes- Ashes and dust blown about in the wind, drifting gently in the air until they become one with their surroundings again and become the soil for new life to be born from them and in their place.

Ashes- Ashes and dust- part of the cycle of life.

Ashes - "Ashes to Ashes and dust to dust, we commit these remains to the ground, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Ashes- not much is left behind when a human body is cremated.

Ashes- Tiny little box representing the earthly life of one person.

Are ashes what we leave behind us, or something else?

Ashes -Symbol of destruction.

Ashes- The city lies destroyed and in ashes.

Ashes- My career, my life, my marriage is in ashes.

Ashes- The dynamite once exploded leveled the mountain into dust and its trees and plants into ashes.

Ashes- Ashe trays, Cigarettes, smoking- money and health lying in ashen remains...

Ashes- My sins, my bad choices-like a stick of dynamite-have reduced my whole life to ashes.

Ashes- A powerful symbol of our mortality.

Ashes- Reminder of change.

Ashes- Reminder of the end game, where we are headed.

Ashes- a humbling reminder of our mortality and of the shortness and uncertainty of life.

Ashes- What both the rich and the poor, the famous and infamous and un-famous return to, each indistinguishable from the other when reduced to ashes.

Ashes- Ashes are a symbol of humility: [from Christianity Today]

..."Ash Wednesday itself is old, but the tradition of humility signified by ash goes back to the days of the prophets. When we adorn ourselves with the mark of our humility, we join with Mordecai, who wore ashes while appealing to God to save the Jews; with Job, who wore ashes while submitting in smallness to the great Creator; with Daniel, who wore ashes while pleading in captivity; and with all the nameless saints who have swiped their foreheads symbolically over the millennia. When faced with cultural challenges and shattering circumstances, the saints of the past survived best when they emulated the self-lowering example of Christ. So too for us in these days of uncertainty."

Ashes- The humbling equalizer to those who think more highly of themselves than they ought.

Ashes- [from comment in Christianity Today]

..."To have the ashes smeared on our foreheads is to embrace a grim truth about our limits: We are not God. From dust we were made-we all arrive here from the same humble beginnings. No one among us came from anything other than the earthly design of human birth. And to dust we shall return-we are mortal. What we have on this earth will end. After a good long life, perhaps, or maybe far too early. Regardless, death's grim grip will overwhelm even the strongest will.

We each live subject to the human constraints of death, weakness, sin, shame, and pain. The ashes remind us that we are but fleeting flowers in a field, here today and gone tomorrow. The rest of the year we may be tempted to mask, hide, deny, or run away from our constraints. Perhaps, we think, we can undo our weakness. Or maybe we can live only out of our strengths, thus avoiding the need to display our weaknesses before others."

Ashes- An ancient symbol of repentance and acknowledgement of being wrong and of having committed sin(s)

Ashes- Sackcloth and ashes: something you put on to show your inward repentance and sorrow of wrongs and sins which you have committed. Sackcloth and ashes-something you wear in utmost humility...

Ashes- Should we wear them on our foreheads? "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Let the ashes be an outward sign of embracing change and your faith inwardly.

Ashes- Once a year make visible the cross with which we are sealed in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.

Ashes- "Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return."

Ashes- A Phoenix rising out of the ashes. There is hope.

Ashes- a western forest is reduced to ashes by forest fires which human beings used to fight but discovered were part of the natural cycle of the life of a forest, [remember Smokey the Bear?] and that it was unavoidable and naturally necessary that the fires happen to replenish and restore the forests, lest the undergrowth be killed off by the blocked sunlight and the whole ecosystem fall into a state of decline. The old must be replaced by the new! Such is life in a forest and such is life as a human being.

Ashes- Ashes are therefore also a symbol of renewal, for out of death comes life: the lesson of life and the truth of Easter.

Are ashes what we leave behind us, or something else?

Matthew's Gospel: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,

where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Are ashes what we leave behind us, or something else? What will you leave behind you?

AMEN