

03-06-19 Wednesday Musing

Today we enter into the season of Lent... beginning with Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, however, sprinkling oneself with ashes marked a sorrow for sin within its pages. We can see evidence of this in numerous places... Esther 4:1, Job 42:6, Jonah 3:5-6 and Daniel 9:3-4 mention Mordecai, Job, the people of Nineveh and Daniel doing just that. And often the Repentance in dust and ashes was accompanied by a time of fasting.

Jesus mentioned fasting in Matthew 6:16-18... 16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

We will come back to this scripture in a moment... but first let's stir those ashes a bit more... In this practice in the Roman Catholic Church, the ashes are obtained from burning the palm branches used in the previous years Palm Sunday service. On Ash Wednesday they are then applied to the forehead of each worshiper in the shape of a cross on Ash Wednesday. Many churches today observe this practice... I myself plan to go to a service tonight. This symbolic service typically focusses on the dual theme of sin and death in the light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. It is a time to confront our own mortality and confess our sins before God within the community of faith. The visual environment usually being solemn and stark. The ashes are used as a sign of mortality and repentance...

Following Ash Wednesday, we enter a time of fasting... a time of abstaining from something you normally do... or eat... or drink... in order to make more time in your day to worship and meditate on God and His Ways. It can be a time that, perhaps, you may want to add some Bible Study time into your day's schedule. Perhaps give of your time and talents to others in a greater way. The length of the fast is typically for the complete season of Lent... which lasts until Easter. But there are no hard and fast rules... with the exception that we must enter into this practice with our heart in the right place... Fast because you want to grow closer to God... fast because you want obey God and become more disciplined in regard to your relationship with Him. As Jesus tells us in the earlier passage... don't fast to be showy... get up as normal.... Get dressed as normal... go about your day as normal... If someone notices that you skipped that soda at lunch... or those sweets... or whatever you choose... it's okay... there isn't a thing wrong with that... but do not skip those sweets to have someone notice that you're being obedient... If this is your reason... you are like the hypocrites that Jesus mentions... you're doing it for your own self-esteem... Not out of repentance and the desire to strengthen your relationship with God.

It's easy to do the "religious things" if others are watching... preaching, praying, attending church... reading the Bible, acts of kindness and charity... not only for the commendation we might get... but the sense of effectiveness... influence our actions might have on someone else... 'our kids see us pray at meals, and it will do them good' or 'if someone sees me reading my Bible, they might be inspired to do the same'. And this isn't all bad... but the danger is all our life starts to be justified and

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understood simply for the effect it can have if others see this this happening. God becomes secondary... we walk the walk and talk the talk because all these things are what we perceive He wants us to do... But He... Himself is falling out of the center focus of our picture... Jesus is pushing us to have a real... utterly authentic... personal relationship with God. As we make our way toward the day we joyously celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, perhaps we should spend some time in prayerful reflection and repentance... re-focusing our picture...

As we go to the Lord in prayer this week, let us remember:

Jeanne Williams, Mary Jane Pettigrew, Harvey Sharpe, Donna Freeman, Anna Gerow, Anne Marie Greer, Nancy Thomas, Margaret Turner, Louise Walters, Family of Delores Johnson - Sister of Troy Johnson, Kathy Russell and friends: Mike Thaxton, Claire Spence, Mary Ellen Rice, Family of Shirley Collins—Sister of Tim Collins.

The sermon this week starts a new series by Rev. Jamie Fonville, this week's title is "The Compassionate Face of Jesus". The bulletin covers will feature different pictures of Jesus each week reflecting the sermon title and content.

The scripture for this Sunday 03-10-19 comes from Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 1:40-45, and II Corinthians 1:1-4.

May the Grace of God surround you... always...

Joan 😊

