**3/5/25**

**Let Me Ash You Why**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good Afternoon! (Good Evening)! As much as I want to welcome each and every one of you is as much as I want to ask each and every one of you why exactly you are even here. Why you literally chose to come to church (or call in) an extra day of the week. Why you chose to willingly have me smear burnt up old palm ash on your forehead in what is supposed to look like the shape of a cross. Why you are willing to start giving up cake, soda, candy, meat, extra clothes, personal items, and other stuff too. Why you are willing to add daily prayer, reading, devotion, fasting, exercise, or consider other things as well. I mean why does Ash Wednesday, and our Lenten Season have us acting and doing things in such a different manner than the entire rest of the year? Does it baffle you, or can you explain it if someone even asks you why when you walk out of those church doors? Does this very small piece and message from the Sermon on the Mount that we seem to hit each and every year on Ash Wednesday allow you to recenter and refocus for these 40 days ahead of us?

Well, I know you did not expect that for a start to a Sermon from me. I know you did not expect that shock value, or that call to self-reflection right from the jump after hearing our words from Scripture. That is also precisely why I did it. Let Me Ash You Why started rolling out of my jumbled-up mind to the edge of my fingertips, and this very Sermon began to take form yesterday morning as I sat in front of my computer. The very start of this Sermon had me slightly worried that you might say the heck with Vicar Vince and you might have debated leaving. (or you even hung up on the Conference Call) The very questions and choices I started this Sermon out with are precisely what we will explore together, and this is the very blessing we have in coming together as a community. For it is not only for comfort, but it is to ask ourselves these critical questions, it is to explore our faith and our very practices, and more importantly it also is to build one another up. Now, I would like to say that I owe you an apology here, but quite frankly I do not, because I just do not want you getting caught up in the actions of the day and the liturgical season. I want you taking things to heart, and I want you doing things for a specific purpose and reason. Now, if you are already doing so, then that is awesome and I applaud you, and by all means keep it up. However, let’s face it, we all know that we always have a little more work and reflection that we can do. We all know that we can improve and be a little better. We also know that we can share with one another and support one another in the process. So, thank you for joining me once again, and let’s roll up our sleeves and let’s get to work together!

With all that being said…. Welcome to Lent! Welcome to that very time and season that we walk a road for forty days, not counting Sundays of course, and we really explore our faith more as we march on towards that cross with Jesus. Welcome to that time that we all too typically manage to commit ourselves increasingly towards our faith because that is what we do, as it is an expectation and a reality of this very season. These 40 days will be some of the hardest for some of us, and they will be trying for some of us, and unfortunately, they will also be nothing but a few more days on the calendar for some of us as well. Our very commitment to this season of Lent, where we place our heart and our mind, really determines our faith and our outcome. It really determines where we are at in this very time and place, and after this season it may have us craving more, and quite frankly it also may have us saying enough and wanting to go back to the way things were before. Then again, it may have us going along as we always do as well. There is indeed no wrong way perse, because each and every one of our faith walks is personal indeed. It is not something that someone can dictate to us, or force us into. We have to feel it, we have to want it, we have to hunger for it, we have to desire it, we have to want to make the very changes necessary that could be life changing. That is also not just in the realm of faith, but that also is in the realm of who we are as people, and who we know we are actually called to be by our Triune God as well. Lent is really what we make of it for sure!

If you really think about it then you come to realize that Lent is nothing to mess with. Lent is a season of personal growth and reflection like no other. It allows us to change a lot, a little, or just a smidge. For I really do believe that no one leaves this season and arrives at Holy Week with no change of heart or mind. I really do believe that when we all make it to Easter Sunday together, when we get to hear the words and experience everything together, and when the glory and awe of all that Jesus did here on earth reaches its very climax, when not even the grave can hold Him down, then you and I have no reason or ability not to realize that giving our all and putting our faith in God is the only true way that life has to offer. We can end up being so excited by this that we practically have to go out and share it with others. We wear it as a badge of honor on our chests. Our God truly is an awesome God, and having all three in one manages to power us on even through the toughest of times. That is the very message and the purpose, and that is the very reality if we open our hearts and minds to it.

Alright, now that I have poured out my heart a bit, and now that I have even got ahead of myself a little more than I would like, and now that I may have been a little too preachy for some of you, I will take this moment to intentionally slow things down and examine this very scripture put in front of us with this Gospel Reading. Now, if you ask me verse 1 says it all. It summarizes everything, and we could practically throw the rest away. So, let me hit the proverbial rewind button and read that out loud once again for all of us to hear and really take in. “[Jesus said to the disciples:] “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” (2) Jesus said to those of his followers back then, and to those of us right here and right now, to not be all flashy and seeking credit for what we do in our daily lives and faith practices. We can do what is right, we invite and welcome, we can care for and share the message with others. However, we need to follow the very Golden Rule that we discussed from one of our recent Gospel Readings as Luke 6:31 offers, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (NRSVUE) (2) For I would venture that you would not want someone coming at you all brash and overwhelmingly, that you would not want someone coming at you all high and mighty, that you would not want someone coming at you in a manner that immediately has you closing off because their approach and their mindset are wrong even though their message and their heart may be partially in the right place. Sharing and caring is one thing, but overpowering and expecting are entirely another. This first verse in our Gospel Reading today simply reminds us to do what we feel is right and worthy, and to do so humbly and respectfully. The reward is already ours once we accept Christ into our hearts. Christ has already done the work, and grace is freely ours as a result. However, it is indeed our job to continue working on ourselves, to continue sharing, and to continue allowing God in more areas and aspects of our lives.

So, one may ask why in the heck do we need the rest of the message then Vicar Vince. Well, I will tell you that it is rather simple honestly. For some of us just may not catch as much from one sentence, or one directive. We may actually need a few more examples, and examples are precisely what has been provided here. For we learn about the three disciplines of Lent being almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. We learn about the right and wrong way to go about these three disciplines. We even learn about the very treasures we will gain from God alone if we follow these three disciplines. We especially learn in our very last verse a summary or goal of it all. Again, let me hit the proverbial rewind button so we all can hear it once more aloud and be able to digest it, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (2) That means everything and anything, that means your entire self, for everything and anything really is heart work. We constantly need to work on our heart, and allow Christ to continue to move in and through us and do the rest. This is how we can approach this season of Lent, and this is how we can even approach every single day of our lives as well. When we give everything and anything to Christ, when we give God all the glory, when we act as “Little Christs” as Martin Luther promoted us to do, then we truly are bringing the Kingdom of God to ourselves and others in the here and now on this earth. We are not just waiting for the day when we are no longer here and raised up. We are not making up some kind of Olympics of piety, or even keeping score. We all can realize our call, we can work on things these 40 days, and we can let this very Season of Lent change us and allow us to impact others as God intended.

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 March 5th, 2025

 Ash Wednesday

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Abingdon Press

(4) 2/14/24

 Ash Wednesday

 Vicar Vince Piekarski

 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Ash Wednesday

 Hypocrisy is born of an inability to trust the mercy of God

 March 5, 2025

 Commentary on Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

 Mary Hinkle Shore

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Ash Wednesday

 Ash Wednesday each year sets before us the gifts of Lenten devotion, disciplines

 that are crucial for faith: “give alms … pray … fast.”

 February 26, 2020

 Commentary on Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

 Melinda Quivik

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Ash Wednesday

 It was a very cold afternoon in Philadelphia.

 February 10, 2016

 Commentary on Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

 Cláudio Carvalhaes

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

  2 “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

  5 “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

  16 “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 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.

  19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”