

The Rev. Kristin Krantz  
St. James', Mt. Airy  
3/1/17

Ash Wednesday  
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17  
Psalm 103  
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Advent is the **beginning** of the church year, and I love that the church turns the page on a fresh calendar as the hours of sunlight approach their nadir. By the time we reach the celebration of the incarnation on December 25<sup>th</sup>, the light has begun to **return**, if only for a few minutes more each day.

Lent is a season for a different **beginning**, a different **returning**.

Today we **begin** again with God, by repenting and **re-turning** to God – that is turning our lives around so that God is at our center.

We are invited into this season of renewal through self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Word.

On the table in the narthex you can choose several options to assist you in prayer, and in reading and meditating on God's Word.

And if you haven't already, I invite you to choose a prayer touchstone for your Lenten journey from the table at the back of the church. These clay stones inscribed with crosses were created by our Youth Group and then fired by Vic Pellicier in a kiln he built in his backyard (so awesome.).

Many people choose to fast in this season – traditionally known as “giving something up” for Lent. If you choose to do this it can take on various forms, everything from giving up caffeine to taking a fast from screen time.

But what I want to focus on tonight is **self-examination** and **repentance**.

In just a few moments we will mark our entry into this holy season with ash on our foreheads and the admonition, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

It is our yearly reminder that we all die. This deep truth is one bookend for these 40 days – just as Easter, the other bookend, tells us another deep truth, that death is not final. Transformation is always out there waiting for us.

The journey from death to resurrection is the work of Lent, and a big part of it is **self-examination** and **repentance**.

So, what of this dust?

Dust can come from lack of use or dust can come from construction.<sup>1</sup>

This Ash Wednesday, what does the ash on your forehead signify?

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<sup>1</sup> From Facebook post from The Rt. Rev. Robert C. Wright, 3/1/17.

Dust that accumulates from lack of use is a symbol of an unexamined faith life. It is faith as obligation or as social norm.

Construction dust is present with you consent to God's work on you, and through you. It is the consequence of a faithful struggle – of new square footage being added.<sup>2</sup>

We are covered in construction dust when we are intentional in **self-examination** and honest in **repentance**.

The Church, in her wisdom, knew the importance of marking off a season for just this purpose every year – and so we are invited into this work again and again, an ever-deepening spiral of faith.

There are as many ways to reflect and repent as there are people gathered here tonight. I can't tell you what this should look like for you. But at the risk of hypocrisy per the Gospel passage I just read, I will share with you what this will look like for me this Lent.

I plan on praying the Litany of Penitence, which we will pray shortly, every day. I will write it in my journal, and each day I will reflect on a different petition or word and what it means for me – what I need to change – or what it is calling me into.

And, I will make time during these 40 days, as I do every year, to enter the Rite of Reconciliation, more commonly known as personal confession, with a priest. I will name out loud the ways in which I have fallen short, repenting and seeking absolution.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

My prayer tonight is that you will join me in the dusty work of faith we are called to **begin** again each Lent, **returning** God to the center of our lives.

~ AMEN ~