

## Ash Wednesday: February 18, 2015

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Norwalk Christian Church, Ash Wednesday, Year B

Our 40-day Lenten season has now begun with Ash Wednesday. 40 days that we use to prepare for what is to come, for what ministry lies ahead of each of us. Yes, tonight we are reminded of our mortality. Reminded that we are from the dust and to the dust we will one day return. But there is redemption. Through Jesus we have been redeemed. This is not a day of despair, it is a day of examination, a day of hope and dreaming. A day for us to examine our lives and skill sets. A day to see what gifts we have been given and to accept those gifts, to own them.

In our scripture passage today Isaiah realizes that his people Israel were simply going through the motions of what they thought religion was. They were fasting but their actions were empty and misunderstood. And empty motions are no substitute for a righteous life. To fast without having dedication and trust in God, without service and justice towards others is no way to truly prepare for God's choosing in our lives.

Isaiah reminds Israel that they cannot simply say their actions are reflecting those of God if they are overlooking the poor and the hungry, the homeless and those in need. It is here that he reminds them that while they're human nature desires them to save themselves, that it is only God who can save us. Remembering our mortality, we come from dust and to dust we will return. It is through God we have redemption, reconciliation and healing. Through God there is more than life eternal, there is humility and service, justice and goodness.

Just as Moses, Elijah and Jesus each took time to prepare for their ministry, we, today, take this Lenten season to prepare ourselves for the ministries God has given us. It is during this time we reflect on what are gifts are and what we need to strengthen our gifts. This season is about reflection and preparation. We do not simply restrain from things of this world, but we receive what we need as preparation for our ministry.

Moses, Elijah and Jesus each had their own time of wandering in their own places of wilderness without distractions of the every day. But the point of those days of wandering was not deprivation, it was not to do without, it was to be able to recognize and receive that which was needed prior to doing God's ministry so they could answer their calling.

It's a time of self-reflection not self-denial. It's a time for you to see what it is you're lacking in order to be your best self. And whatever that is whether it is taking something away or adding something new to your day, whether it is finally accepting the gifts that you have been given or whether it is time that you put some old habits to rest. It is a time for you to prepare yourself and get yourself ready to be all that you can be and all that you already are.

This Lenten season begins with ashes as we remember our mortality, but it does not mean it is a season without joy. Let this Lenten season bring us the freedom we need to prepare ourselves for meaningful acts of devotion and lives in which we answer God's choosing. May we together explore new ways in which we can prepare ourselves for a more meaningful response to God's chosen life for us. And to find this new vision of humanity that Isaiah is talking about here, so we can break forth crying out, Here I am!