

REFLECTIONS DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

Ash Wednesday
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Delivered by
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Tonight, we mark the beginning of Lent. It's a season in the church during which people have historically used it as a time of self-examination. Have I lived up to the practices Jaye just read from Matthew? When I give to the church or to some charity that takes care of people in their need, is it done in a way that doesn't seek attention? Do I give without thinking about a reward for myself: the tax deduction or the pride expressed in letting someone know how much I give or some other way of being recognized? When I give is it done in a way that simply offers it to the Lord freely without thought or desire for reward?

When I pray—if I pray—is it done for attention or simply to talk with and listen for God?

If I fast do other people notice by the look on my face and ask if I'm okay? Or do I intentionally give something up like Facebook or food or something else I really enjoy as a way of sacrificing something I love to remind me that Christ has sacrificed his life so I might know how much God loves me?

As I store up treasures, what kind are they? Are they the kind that someone can take from me? Or are they more in line with what Jesus values: relationships with all kinds of people, loving people I might think of as enemies or people I might find hard to love. Where is your heart when it comes to what you value most in this life?

Tonight you are invited to receive the imposition of the ashes. The traditional way of receiving them is to have a cross smudged on your forehead, but you may also have it smudged on the back of your hand if you like. Ashes remind us that we are God's, that our life in this world is relatively short and we will return to the earth out of which we have come.

Ashes can also remind us of the brokenness in the world. We might remember times we've turned from someone in need or allowed anger to get the best of us or let ourselves down by not living up to Jesus' call to love God with all that we have and are and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The ashes remind us that we are human beings who belong to God.

So when you come forward in a few moments and receive the ashes on the forehead or the back of the hand, it's an invitation to recommit ourselves to Jesus way in the world and to spend our lives as best we can working to be God's love and justice and peace and compassion in a world so often in turmoil. It's really an invitation for all of us to start anew and confirm in our own hearts and minds that we really do want to follow in the ways of Jesus which is different from the hardness and violence and life-taking ways we so often hear about and experience. It's a commitment to offer God's care in the world through Jesus Christ.

So let me offer a suggestion tonight offered by a Franciscan:

Fast from the ways you can do violence with your thoughts, your words and your actions; and feast on ways to bring about more joy and laughter.