

John Sampson  
"Dust to Dust"  
Text: Romans 8:14 - 17  
Preached at KVCC  
June 9, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

These are the words I shared back at the beginning of March, during our Ash Wednesday service. On that cold, dark evening I invited all who were here to come and be marked with ashes to symbolize our shared mortality, and our desire to turn our lives towards the direction of God's dream for all of humanity.

Ash Wednesday began a journey, which ends today. It is the journey we've traveled with Jesus through the last days of his ministry, through the horror and abandonment of Holy Week, to the celebration of unexpected new life at Easter, and through the season of Resurrection. And today we end our journey on a day we call Pentecost, a moment when we give thanks for God giving her children a holy spirit, which will give us the courage and strength and perseverance to continue the work of our teacher Jesus throughout our lives, and throughout the world. It will give us the strength to do the work of love.

What started on a cold dark night in March, with the trees bare, and snow up in the mountains, ends today in warmth, and the greening of the forests, and the return of the birds and the animals.

What started in ashes ends today in spirit and in a proclamation of the truth that we truly are all the children of God.

We haven't ended where we began.

So when I said "dust to dust" all those nights ago, did you think I was telling you that the dust our lives would end in, would be the same dust we began with?

It couldn't be. Because if it was then why did we take this journey with Jesus through Lent and Easter?

Why did some of us in this community come together to fast, and learn more about ourselves and what God might be inviting us to do with our lives?

If the dust we began with is simply the dust we end in, then why do we follow the stories of our spiritual tradition, stories which are not stories of science, but of the possibility of the transformation of our human hearts?

What would it mean to mark our foreheads with ashes on Ash Wednesday, only to mark them with ashes again today, to mark ourselves with a symbol of mortality again today after we have traveled a road of resurrection?

It makes no sense.

But perhaps our spiritual ancestors, those who gave us the words “dust to dust,” had something else in mind. Perhaps they envisioned that the dust we came from would not be the dust we ended in. Perhaps there is another possibility. And we hear what this other possibility might be spoken by the Jewish rabbis in this morning’s first reading.

In this reading the Jewish sages return to the opening stories of creation where God forms humanity. And in an expanded meditation on the biblical record they imagine God telling the angel Gabriel to collect dust from all the corners of the earth so that when a human dies the dust of their bodies will find a home, no matter where their life ends. This is the dust of mortality. This is the dust you might have thought I was talking about back on Ash Wednesday.

But the rabbis push their riff on the creation stories to tell us something about what it means to be human, and our relationship to God that all of this talk of dust might have obscured. They tell us that in love God also asks for a spoon filled with dust from the place where the altar in the temple of Jerusalem will stand. God asks for dust from the place where heaven and earth meet. God asks for dust from the place where her presence will shine forth like the sun itself. This sacred dust, that participates in eternity, in holy Love, and in Divinity, is the dust that is baked into our very existence. This is the dust, this is the spiritual truth, I believe that surpasses our mortality, and reveals to us that we are the spirit filled children of God herself.

To say “dust to dust” doesn’t need to be a statement about death. I think it could be a revelation about our own sacredness.

And so today, on this day after the darkness of Lent and Holy Week, on this day, a day that shines with the radiance of Easter, I invite you to come forward and be marked not with ashes, but with a symbol of the presence of God’s spirit in your life. I invite you to come and be marked with gold.

The rabbis don’t tell us what the sacred dust that was used to create us looked like, but I think it was gold. I think it was gold because gold has been used throughout our sacred history as a symbol of the presence of God’s spirit. It reflects light; it shines. It captures the light of God. It is gold that was used to illuminate manuscripts, to suggest God’s spirit in the very words of our sacred texts.

And so on this day of Pentecost come and be marked with dust – not the dust of mortality, but the dust of God’s spirit present in your life. Come and be marked with gold. Come and be marked not to add something to our lives that isn’t already there, but come and be marked as a way to reveal the holiness that is already present within all of God’s children, that is already present within you. Come and be illuminated include to proclaim that you are the true sacred text of God.

So, I invite you to come forward, if and only if you feel called to do so, and I will anoint your forehead with gold dust. I invite you to come forward to be marked with a symbol of the crazy, outlandish truth that you are God’s spirit filled child.

[ritual of institution of gold dust, followed by singing Alleluia]

Amen.