

Ash Wednesday
February 13, 2013
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Now

I am never ready for Lent to begin, even if Ash Wednesday is later in February or in early March. I'm never ready because I'm never sure I want to change or do the self-examination Lent requires. Few of us want to add discipline, change to our daily routines; few of us want to consider how short life is; few of us want to experience death in order to know new life.

Henri Nouwen in the Lenten booklet, *Called to Life, Called to Love*, writes "(Lent) is the time during which we not only prepare ourselves to celebrate the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also the death and resurrection that constantly takes place within us. Life is a continuing process of the death of the old and the familiar, and being reborn again into a new hope, a new trust, a new love..." I like the old and familiar. I'm not sure I'm ready for being "reborn" again.

So, I need the ashes on my forehead as encouragement to let go and let God work in my life. The prophet Joel called for the trumpet to sound the alarm and call people to fast, to pray, to return to the Lord, to experience the gift of God's love now!

St. Paul wrote to the community of Corinth with the same urgency. "*Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.*" Paul hoped the Corinthians would understand the need for reconciliation, the need for forgiveness, now. The community was threatened by division and conflict. Many in Corinth questioned Paul's leadership and teaching. He was criticized and rejected. Paul wrote to urge each individual to examine his/her behavior. Change was needed immediately. Let go, let God, forgive. Work for reconciliation and healing.

We may begin this Lent with some urgent need for forgiveness, for healing, for reconciliation. Now is the time to offer up our hurts, our anger, our resentments. Now is the time to forgive. Now is the time to work on those relationships that require healing. This is the "new hope, the new trust, the new love" Henri Nouwen suggests we can experience during our Lenten journey.

Jesus cautioned his disciples to beware of hypocrisy. Public acts of piety might lead to self-centeredness, self-importance. God knows our hearts. Whether or not we wear the ashes on our foreheads all day, or wash them off right after we leave church, is not the issue. The issue is will we practice what we preach? Will we forgive? Will we work for reconciliation? Will we look into our own hearts and our own souls first before daring to judge another human being?

The theologian John McClendon has written that "all theology is autobiographical." The ashes on this day ask us to open our lives to God and let God work in us. Letting go means dying to whatever keeps us from spiritual growth, whatever obstacles block our

way from knowing Christ and making Christ known. Each of us finds our own way to open up. As a community we open up to the reality of the cross and the new life Easter can bring.

So, now, starting today there will be change – change in our corporate worship, change in our individual lives. May we move through the next six and a half weeks with a sense of urgency, acknowledging the shortness and uncertainty of life, while living with the hope of eternity. Today, now, we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We also remember that we are dust bound for glory!

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21