



Time for a Spring Dirting – TouchPoint for February 17, 2021

TOUCH POINT

Genesis 3:19b: “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

It’s probably one of the least popular phrases in our liturgical year. If you were to conduct a survey of favorite worship lines or phrases, I doubt it would rank up there with *“This is the feast of victory for our God.”* Or even, *“Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.”*

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Eugene Peterson, in his translation puts it even more bluntly, *“You started out as dirt, you’ll end up dirt.”* Dust. Dirt. Isn’t that what we try to get rid of in our lives?

“I need to dust.” *“Look at all the dust in here.”* Shouldn’t our lives pass a white glove inspection?

And dirt. It’s not a compliment to say something or someone is dirty. Somehow, I don’t see Tide making a commercial that says, *“Dirt. No problem. Stay dirty. It was dirt you came from and to dirt you shall return.”* No, we want to clean up. We want a Spring cleaning in our lives. That is the purpose of Lent, isn’t it? To provide a Spring cleaning in our lives so we can be pure and holy for Easter.

So why does our Spring cleaning begin with, *“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* Sounds more like a Spring dirting. And why does it so offend us? Why do I have many friends who refuse to have ashes put on their forehead and these words spoken over them?

Is it because I think I am better than that? I was meant for something more. Is it because I’ve been constantly told that this life is just a prelude, a rehearsal, a tryout, for where I will spend eternity?

An eternity AWAY FROM HERE! And this dust and dirt. But this is not true to the biblical witness. N.T. Wright, wrote this about our world and God’s relationship to it.

The first followers of Jesus saw “heaven” and “earth” — God’s space and ours, if you like — as the twin halves of God’s good creation. Rather than rescuing people from the latter in order to reach the former, the creator God would finally bring heaven and earth together in a great act of new creation, completing the original creative purpose by healing the entire cosmos of its ancient ills. — It would be a “rescued and renewed creation.”

Dust, therefore, is not something that needs to be escaped, denied, or avoided. It is that which God redeems. It is that which God will rescue and renew. And that shouldn’t be a surprise to us.

You see, it was dust and dirt that the Mystery created and called 'Good'. It was dust and dirt from which

we were created... and dust and dirt into which the Mystery gladly breathed its breath and Spirit... and then declared us 'Very Good.'

And it was dust and dirt that the Word became, in the event of Christmas and the incarnation.

And it is dust and dirt in which the Divine continues to dwell to this day... in you and me.

So maybe we shouldn't be doing a Spring cleaning this Lent, but a Spring dirting. A getting back to the creation, the earth, the dirt from which we came. **And seeing it as a place of sacred renewal and Divine dwelling.** The idea in our western world that the earth and creation, dust and dirt, the physical and material, are somehow opposed to God has no basis in the Biblical story.

The idea that the spiritual somehow is better, far superior, more desirable, than this flesh and world has no place in the Christian tradition. Frederick Buechner, in his book, "Wishful Thinking" puts it well in his description of the word 'incarnation.' He writes:

"The word became flesh," wrote John, "and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth". That is what incarnation means. It is untheological. It is unsophisticated. It is undignified. But according to Christianity, it is the way things are.

All religions and philosophies that deny the reality or the significance of the material, the fleshly, the earthbound, are themselves denied. Moses at the burning bush was told to take off his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy ground,

and incarnation means that all ground is holy ground because God not only made it but walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it.

If we are saved anywhere, we are saved here.

And what is saved is not some diaphanous distillation of our bodies and our earth, but our bodies and our earth themselves. Jerusalem becomes the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband. Our bodies are sown perishable and raised imperishable."

And then he concludes with this marvelous statement.

"One of the blunders religious people are particularly fond of making is the attempt to be more spiritual than God."

Dust therefore, is the starting point of both the incarnation and the resurrection. Jesus after all, still bore the marks and wounds in his resurrected body, an affirmation of the dust from which we were created if ever there was one.

So maybe we shouldn't be doing a Spring cleaning this Lent, but a Spring dirting: a getting back to the creation, the earth, the dirt from which we came. **And seeing it as holy ground.**

And all of this leads to this meal we are about to share. And the other re-membering that needs to take place today.

"Do this to re-member me."

In the earthly elements of bread and drink, we are re-membered to the Christ. Through the earthly elements of bread and drink which grow out of the dust of the earth, we are re-membered to Christ, the

“Universal Christ” as Richard Rohr puts it. Or, as Thich Nhat Hanh states in his book “Living Buddha, Living Christ”,

“The bread we eat is the whole cosmos.”

In other words, in this meal, we find our connection to all dust and dirt... to all of creation... and its creator. So maybe we shouldn't be doing a Spring cleaning this Lent, but a Spring dirting. A getting back to the creation, the earth, the dirt from which we came. **And seeing it as a place of Divine sustenance and Holy Communion.**

To be re-membered to the Christ in this meal is to be re-membered to the one in whom all creation came into being... and then who became flesh himself...who became dust...and walked the earth ... only to be returned to dust on a Friday afternoon...and then resurrected, on the following Sunday...

You see, the dust and dirt of our lives are not shameful. Dust and dirt are the starting point of the incarnation and the resurrection. So, to remember that 'you are dust' is to remember that you are a creation of God... And to remember that 'you shall return to dust' is to remember that you will be a new creation in Christ. I hate to break it to you, but you can't be resurrected until you first return to dust. I've learned that from my friends who have been through addiction recovery.

Look, you and I may not like the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return” but it is the only way to resurrection. And you can't avoid it by not going to Ash Wednesday services or simply doing Ash Wednesday via Zoom.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

My good friend and mentor, Bishop Howie Wennes once wrote that these words are both ‘reality and promise’. I like that.

“Reality and Promise.”

“Reality”, in that this is what is going to happen to you and me. “Promise”, in that dust is the sacred ground from which God births... and will re-birth. Because these words are both reality and promise... therefore ... “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” is not something to be lamented...but a declaration of the continuing story of God making all things new, including you and me.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

If God made us from dust once before, then God can surely do it again after we return to dust. Just as God did with Jesus. And that is the promise of God in being re-membered to Christ in this meal ...

Because, if God can raise the Christ from the dust of this earth ... then, God can surely raise us up again, we and all of creation, which has been re-membered to God in the incarnation and this meal.

Let the Spring dirting begin.

Amen

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless...Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Our Father 3, Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Church)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.