



TOUCH POINT

The Second Dust-Up – Touchpoint for March 2, 2022

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.”

These are the words that are spoken over us this Ash Wednesday, and every Ash Wednesday.

They come at us and hit us like a ton of bricks...

And they aren't just spoken over us...

They are imposed on us. The 'imposition of the ashes' we call it...

And the sign of the cross is made and marked – imposed – on our forehead, with ashes.

I'm not really sure I like that. No, I take that back... I'm really sure I don't like that.

And Eugene Peterson's take isn't any better:

“You started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt.”

I much prefer the first time the sign of the cross was made and marked on my forehead, in my baptism. That, I think, was probably a more joyful time for everybody. I can't say for sure because I was only 3 weeks old.

But I do remember my mom and dad talking fondly about it on occasion. Me in the family baptismal gown, crying when the cold water hit my face and head...

...because I didn't understand what was happening.

I don't ever remember them talking fondly about the imposition of ashes and the sign of the cross marked in black on my forehead, and being told that I was dust and to dust I shall return.

No, that never came up at family gatherings and times of reminiscing... and still doesn't!

That first cross marked on my forehead in my early days, signified a new life, a new birth, a new creation. And so it was a time of joy and celebration.

This cross, this day, marked on my forehead with ashes is more a reminder of the end of life, the death that follows from birth, and the aging of my creation.

“Remember that you are dust... And to dust you shall return.” And the sign of the cross is made upon me again...

...and I want to cry again like I did when I was 3 weeks old, only not because I don't understand what is happening like back then, but because I do.

“Remember that you are dust... And to dust you shall return.”

Now if that's all there was to this day, it would be a mournful day indeed. It would be a dust storm to avoid.

But there is another re-remembering that is taking place today as well -- another re-remembering that we are called to do.

“Take and eat. Take and drink. Do this for the re-remembering of me.”

Now at first glance it would appear that these are two opposite viewpoints, or that one is given to make up for the other.

At first glance it may appear that the re-remembering of Jesus in Holy Communion is a rescue from the words:

“Remember that you are dust... And to dust you shall return.”

But I don't think that is the case. I think they are part and parcel of the same.

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.'

Maybe all dust-ups and dust storms aren't bad.

After all, it was dust and dirt that the Divine became in the event of Christmas and the incarnation, and that created quite a storm!

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

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 desirous 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.”

This is why Paul writes in I Corinthians 15, “This perishable nature will put on imperishability, and the mortal body will put on immortality.” One including the other, not one replacing the other.

And so to be re-membered to Christ in this meal is to be re-membered to the one who became flesh -- who became dust -- and walked the earth... and then returned to dust on a Friday afternoon...

... only to be resurrected, on the following Sunday.

Dust is the starting point of the incarnation and the resurrection.

Jesus, after all, still bore the marks and wounds on his resurrected body, an affirmation of the dust from which we were created if ever there was one.

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.

To 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return' is to be reminded that we don't hold life in our hands, but life holds us in its hands. It's 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.

And to have the cross marked on us in ashes is to be reminded that we do not bear the cross, but the cross -- and he who died on it -- bears us, and has borne us, again and again.

That gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, “born again,” doesn't it? Maybe we aren't so much “born (b-o-r-n) again” as we are “borne (b-o-r-n-e) again.”

Everyone wants to be born again, but nobody wants to die in order for that to happen. No one wants to be borne again by the one who bore us in the first place.

Nobody wants to be like the seed that must die and fall to the ground before it can be re-born, but that's the way life is... this one and the next.

“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, and marked with the cross of Christ in my baptism and on this Ash Wednesday.

Because if God raised us up from dust once before, then God can surely raise us up again after we return to dust, just as God did with Jesus.

And that’s a dust-up worth being re-membered to.

Amen.

Wednesday Respite is a 30-min contemplative service of scripture, prayer, music and a **Spirited Touchpoint** by Spirit in the Desert faith mentor, Rev. “Bro. Jim” Hanson.

Touchpoint is a reflection on where God’s story touches our life story. It is a short homily based on a biblical story of people in the Old and New Testaments and their relationship with God. Our spiritual ancestors’ experience of God’s grace connects with our lives in the present and our relationship with the Divine. Previous Touchpoints are available as [PDFs](#) or on [SoundCloud](#).

Tagged with [forgiveness](#), [grace](#), [salvation](#), [Brokenness](#), [Fish](#), [Jesus](#), [healing](#), [separation](#), [mystery](#), [Divine](#)
[Grace](#), [unity](#)

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

Creator Spirit, Come

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.
Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.
Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother

Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

A Blessing

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.

May the Lord protect you and guide you.

May His strength uphold you.

His light shine upon you.

His peace surround you.

His love enfold you.

May the Lord bless you.