

Dear friends, we have gathered here tonight on this solemn day called Ash Wednesday. We are here to begin our Lenten journey. Ancient words will soon be spoken over us as ashes from last year's palm crosses shape a cross on our foreheads. This old and sacred tradition cannot be modernised as we perhaps change and update some of our services. Words from the bible are quoted; **“Remember you are dust and to dust you will return”**. (Genesis 3 v19). These words allude to when God admonished Adam and Eve as they left paradise in the Garden of Eden.

These words are the very facts of our lives. Yet they are not meant to frighten us or to crush us with despair. They are a loving reminder of reality, of our mortality.

.We are fragile creatures whom God made from the earth .Our earthly bodies will die; yet we are made in the image of God and called into eternal life through his son Jesus Christ our Lord. The ashes mark us as mortal and as beloved.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells us to be aware of practising piety before others in order to be seen by them. Do not fast with gloomy faces just to impress people; and do not pray on street corners for applause. Instead go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret.

Ash Wednesday strips away all pretence

The cross on our foreheads is not just a badge of holiness for us to display: it's a quiet confession “I am dust, I have

wandered, and I need mercy”... It invites us into the hidden life with God, where real transformation happens. So what does this mean for us as we begin Lent 2026?

1, we need to acknowledge our dust, that we are not self-sufficient in a world that prizes independence and image. The ashes remind us we are dependent on God; apart from him we are but dust, YET from dust God breathed life. From the ashes God makes creation.

2, In Joel we read “Rend your heart, not your clothes” Examine yourselves honestly. Where have we sought praise and approval from others instead of from God? When has our faith been performance rather than a personal relationship with God. Guilty

3, we should embrace the disciplines asked of us- Fasting, Praying and Almsgiving. These are not punishments but Pathways. They clear a space for God; they help us to focus on Him. They help us to hunger for righteousness more than comfort.

4, we must look to the cross. The ashes form a cross, because mortality meets God’s mercy there. Jesus, who became dust for us, transforms our dust into glory.

So as we come forward for ashes, let this be no mere ritual

. Let it be a turning point. Return to God with your whole

heart... Let this Lent be a season of honest seeking, quiet devotion and renewed trust in the one who forgives, restores and calls us home.

Like to finish with a poem written by Jan Richardson an author and minister from the Methodist tradition with great insight

It is called: Ash Wednesday, Blessing the Dust

All those days you felt like dust, like dirt.
As if all you had to do was turn your face
Toward the wind and be scattered
Into the four corners, or swept away
By the smallest breath
As insubstantial

Did you know what the Holy one
Can do with dust?
This is the day we freely say
We are scorched.

This is the hour we are marked
By what has made it through
The burning

This is the moment
We ask for the blessing
That lives within the ancient ashes

That makes its home inside
The soil of this sacred earth

So let us be marked, not for sorrow,
And let us be marked, not for shame.
Let us be marked not for false humility
Nor for thinking we are less than we are –
But for claiming what God can do
Within the dust, within the dirt,
Within the stuff of which the world is made
And the stars that blaze in our bones
And the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge
that we bear.

May the Lord bless our journey; May we emerge at Easter
not just marked by ashes, but transformed by grace.
Amen