

# **Sermon for Ash Wednesday, March 2, 2022**

## **“Marked by Pain, Tended with Love”**

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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Today, as we prepare to be marked with ashes, I'm reminded of the widely used aphorism: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." That battle is on full display in Ukraine right now, yet we all carry pain. We all need loving kindness.

I think people who work near the Mayo clinic get this. I've seen such tenderness at the restaurants, shops, and hotels up there. Waiters show more patience to people who can't order succulently, who describe that they don't know what day it is, but do know they need to eat. Store clerks appear more understanding of people searching to find cash or the credit card - is it in the hospital room, at the hotel, in the car? And where is the car? A place where pain is harder to hide seems to invite more compassion. These service providers are accustomed to the signs of pain, of anxiety, fatigue, grief. They see the signs and respond with such kindness.

Today we all wear the signs of pain on our foreheads as we are marked with ash. The ashes make the pain of the human condition visible. We are human, we are mortal, we are dust. We are grieving and broken. We have harmed others and the earth. We are worried and afraid.

On Ash Wednesday, we don't have to hide that pain and we see that others have it too. We get to bring our sin and brokenness out into the open where it can be healed. On Ash Wednesday, we receive God's tender kindness. We're reminded that God forms us out of the dust and breathes life into our dust, that God makes beautiful things out of dust. We receive God's tenderness in a cross marked on our brow, in food for the journey, in words and songs of steadfast love.

On Ash Wednesday, we're also guided into ways of practicing tender kindness, guided by both Jesus and the prophet Isaiah. Jesus directs us away from trying to earn accolades by showy acts, away from trying to appear good and from what we now call virtue signaling. Often, we act in those ways when we're feeling inadequate and afraid, when we're trying to cover up our own pain. These flashy actions can foster pride, they can contribute to jealousy and competition. They can cause more pain.

So, Jesus leads us away from all that and calls us to nurture inner lives of generosity, prayer, and devotion. Tending to our inner life is a way of practicing kindness to ourselves and others. We are nourished and then can offer true generosity and service in the world. This Lent, we'll focus on our inner life as we reflect upon prayer and devotion during Lenten Evening Prayer services. We'll get to practice generosity together as we support Afghan guests. We bring our offerings forward to the altar, not to be showy but so our bodies and spirits can be shaped and formed. We'll get to share in the fast Isaiah describes as we focus on caring for those in need.

Isaiah's words lead us into loving kindness for others and ourselves. Isaiah proclaims that we will experience healing as we tend to others' pain. "If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil; if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of

the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”

We are all marked by pain. Today that is visible.

Each day, we are called to see and tend the pain in others.

We can do this because God knows our pain, gives us tender mercy, and leads us in the ways of loving kindness.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.