

Karen Hollis
Ash Wednesday
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

I always see Lent coming, though on its way it hides behind trees and in bushes and speeds up time so that all of a sudden it's in front of me and I wonder how it happened. Today as Lent stands in front of us, I invite us all to breathe in. We are invited again to spend these days with God and allow God to bring us along in a story that started a long time ago when a voice burst the universe into being. In the beginning space expanded into a canvas of possibility. Matter organized itself into collections of stars mixed with gas and dust, spinning like disks in space. The larger the stars, the more spectacularly they lived and died, creating heavier elements that would become the building blocks for life. Here where our solar system is, there once was at least one such star. Left behind was a cloud of gas and dust . . . a womb, just waiting. Then, the explosion from a nearby supernova gave it a nudge and the gas and dust in that cloud started bumping into each other, gravitating toward each other and binding together. In the beginning God said to Eve and Adam, remember, you are dust and to dust you will return. You were made from the earth and after your days of bearing and raising children, of working your fields and enjoying the fruit of your labours, you will return to the earth from where you came.

I always wondered where those words came from . . . indeed God spoke those words when the world was still new. In the beginning God designed the world to be renewing and because of that, we are made of star stuff, we are dust and earth, God's own beloved creation. On this day we are called back to God, called back to dust, to intentionally enter this cycle of transformation that has been true since the beginning of time. Still, Lent is a bit of a journey into the unknown; luckily Jesus who walked through death into new life goes ahead of us, leading the way . . . through prayer.

We watch Jesus in the scriptures rise early and go off to pray. His disciples have to go and search for him because he simply disappears. They find him alone in prayer; they see him transfigured; they

struggle to stay awake as he pleads with God that death may not be part of the cycle. Jesus walks through death because he knows his identity as God's own, because he lives in God's love and is plugged into God's life through prayer. Prayer is the reason he is able to sustain his life and ministry and call – he does nothing for show, rather lives to love and serve the one who created us.

Let us draw close to God, walk on holy ground, perhaps even find ourselves on our knees in prayer. Let us seek God from wherever we find ourselves on the cycle of life, death and emerging new life; let us draw close to the One who brings us through every time; let us be blessed with dust that reminds us of the transformation that is possible with God. Hear this poem by Jan Richardson:

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
to the four corners
 or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—
 did you not 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
or 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
we bear.

Thanks be to God for the dust, for the path never erased, always transformed, and all the blessings that lie ahead. Amen