

Karen Hollis | February 17, 2021

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday – Ashes for the World

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

It's hard for me to not have actual ashes at this service. Maybe I just love ritual; this one certainly resonates for me; this ritual that says you are mortal, you are dust, to dust you will return, and all dust is beloved of God. The ritual resonates as a way of being marked as God's own; as the gospel says, it's not for other people to notice, rather a statement to myself. The ashes say no matter what, that truth will never change.

This year in particular I need the ashes to tell me I am beloved dust . . . that the earth is beloved dust. In this time of covid that is not yet over, as economies struggle, loved ones die, as we continue to be isolated, it's important to be reminded of God's faithfulness. Perhaps the whole world needs ashes today; the whole world needs reminding that we are in God's hands.

As I thought about ashes for the world, images of volcanos came to mind, forest fires, then 911. I was reminded of a song by Elvis Perkins called Ash Wednesday . . . he wrote it after his mother died on

911. You see, it was a Tuesday when the airplanes hit the twin towers . . . and on Wednesday New York city was covered in ash. (show pictures) Ash hung in the air . . . ash covered streets and cars and buildings . . . ash clung to people's hair and faces and clothing. The shock and the horror of the day were met with a thick layer of ash, the colour of eternity, the colour of God's promise that this beautiful creation still belongs to God. The city was marked with the truth that this world God made includes death, but we are not called to hold tight to it or try to control it . . . in fact, if we loosen our grip, open our palms and extend them to God, we are in a posture to receive the gift of knowing that life and death are fundamentally in God's hands. If we're brave enough to let go, we find ourselves at home in this cycle of love and renewal.

In this season of covid when death is making itself known in so many different ways, from over 2 million human deaths worldwide, to the death of a way of life. In this season where we've all lost something, we all need to know we are at home in the cycle of love and renewal. If you find yourself wanting to receive actual ashes, there are ashes at the church . . . they are the remains of burned palms

that we once waved at Jesus, while shouting  
“Hosanna, you are our rescuer,” as he came riding  
into Jerusalem. They are the symbol of a promise  
that God is faithful in every season. After you receive  
ashes on your forehead or the back of your hand . . .  
if you have some left over (and I think you will), the  
proper thing is to give them back to the earth . . . I  
think particularly this year, the world needs them.  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. You are dust and to  
dust you shall return; you are held in the balance of  
life by our creator.