

Saint Thomas' Church
 Ash Wednesday
 February 17, 2021
 rmceely+

. . . remember o man
 of dust thou art
 and to dust thou shalt return

And so with this chilling reminder of our mortality ringing in our ears

And with crosses of ashes emblazoned on our foreheads

We begin the 40-day journey

To the Resurrection
 to Christ

Why have Christians put themselves through it?

Why do we begin with a cross of ashes?

and a reminder of our mortality?

Our sins consume us.

From the little ones to the big ones

They eat at our soul.

Their magnitude is only a matter of degree

But the result is the same.

Where a soul once was

There is left a hole.

And in its place is built a wall

A solid stone wall

Sin by sin by sin.

A wall separating us from God.

From the love of God

From redemption

From salvation

From heaven

A wall separating us from each other
A wall of guilt,
 of shame,
 of embarrassment
We become isolated
 And in danger.

The odor of it repels all that is good,
The odor of it attracts satan and those who do his will.
And the un-absolved sin begets another and another.

I want to tell you a story.
It is about King David,
 The boy who slayed Goliath and saved a nation.
 The shepherd boy who became one of the great Kings of the
 Hebrew Nation.

It was a hot evening in Jerusalem
 And David took to the roof of his palace
 Where he could gain respite from the evening heat.
And as he gazed out at his capital city
 He saw a woman that intrigued him.
She was entirely naked in a bath down below.
He stared and became besotted of her.
She was Bathsheba
 The wife of one of David's soldiers who was serving far from
Jerusalem.
David was King and ordered her to be brought to him.
He bedded her.
An adulterous relationship was formed.
A baby was conceived.

David was suddenly mortified.
 How could he overcome the shame?
He came upon a plan.

He would order Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba
Home to Jerusalem
Uriah, would lie with Bathsheba
And when the baby was born, Uriah would claim it as his
own

The plan failed.

Uriah would not have the joys of his marital bed
While his men suffered in battle.

What to do?

David came upon another plan

He would order Uriah back into battle

And would quietly order that he be abandoned by his troops

Uriah was killed in battle.

David took Bathsheba as a wife.

But the babe was still-born.

A prophet, Nathan learned of David's iniquity.

In the court he approached David with a tale

He said there was a creditor who was owed a great sum.

He went to the debtor to collect.

But instead of selecting from the flock

He chose a lamb

A lamb that was beloved of the debtors young son.

The debtor pleaded that he could take any number of sheep

But please spare the one that his son had raised and loved.

The debtor slew the lamb as the boy watched

Tossed his head in laughter as he rode away.

Nathan asked David what sort of man was this creditor

And what shall be done with him.

David was enraged and by decree demanded to know the name of
the scoundrel so that David himself could behead him.

In a quiet voice Nathan said:

O King. You art that man.

David saw who he had become.

After a time he wrote a psalm of remorse and penitence.
 You read it a moment ago.
 It's the 51st psalm.
 Now that you know the story behind it, the back story
 Let's go through it again.

David is crushed by his sin: first adultery and then murder.
 He confesses that he openly sinned before God
 And it that it was against God that he sinned.
 His sin is haunting him—"my sin is ever before me".

He begs God to remove the stench
 The filth of his sin from his life.
 "wash me thoroughly from my wickedness
 and cleanse me from my sin"

He cries out:
 "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean
 wash me and I shall be whiter than snow".

The 51st Psalm does not seek God's help for better behavior
 Instead, David pleas for a new creation
 One that begins with a new and contrite heart.
 For that is where he must begin his new life.
 Appealing to the Creator of all life
 David cries;
 "Create in me a new heart
 and renew a right spirit within me."

And now the ashes on our foreheads begin to make more sense.

The ancient Hebrews
 poured ashes upon themselves as a sign of their grief
 for the death of a loved one.

We too, mourn tonight.

We mourn for the death of our sinful lives
 Even as we walk the 40 days to the Resurrection
 Our celebration of new life.
 A new life in Christ, our saviour.

A new life in which our absolved sins are gone.

As if they never occurred.
 And we are restored to life anew
 And given a new chance at eternity.

The wall of separation is removed, stone by stone by stone.
 The love of God restored,
 The grace of God again pours down upon us.

We start the season of Lent with the taste of ashes.

The burnt up remains of what had once been thriving with life.
 Something that was whole and complete
 A moment of life
 Palm branches in our case.

It is not unexpected that this sign of destruction
 marks the beginning of our preparation for the end of our life.
 and the foretaste
 the touch
 of our resurrection in Christ.

So why do we observe the discipline of Lent?

Archbishop Morse wrote:

“Lent is a period of preparation
 for Christians to enter into the ultimate mystery of our existence
 the resurrection-Easter

The meaning of Lent is to go up to Jerusalem with Jesus
 To enter into His passion and death.

Allowing us to comprehend the ultimate reality of our Faith
 Resurrection.”

“The Christian mystery is that we suffer with and for Him.

And He suffers with us.

We die with Him in His death

And He with us in our death.

We, at the end, will share with Him in His resurrection

and the gift of eternal life.

To enter into the Passion of Christ is to love through tragedy.

A common rejection of belief in God is that if there was a God

He would not let the innocent suffer.

But that would nullify the Crucifixion.

T.S. Eliot writes:

‘Again in spite of that we call this Friday, good. The suffering of the only innocent in human history.’

We go up to Jerusalem in Lent.

The meaning of Lent is the suffering of the Passion and the death of Jesus.

Together in union with Him, we will share His resurrection.

Let us journey together these 40 days

Up to Jerusalem

To Resurrection