

I.N.I.

Ash Wednesday
March 6, 2019
Psalm 103:13-14

Remember Dust

What's the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear "Ash Wednesday"? Ashes, right! Ashes are black. They remind us of the blackness of sin. What's the next thing that comes to your mind when you hear "Ash Wednesday"? Lent! Lent is a season of repentance from the blackness of sin. This year, the theme of our midweek services is

A LENT TO REMEMBER.

The key word will be **REMEMBER!** Each week, we'll focus on something God remembers or something God causes us to remember. When the word "remember" is used about God, it usually refers to the confident end of an extended period of waiting for His Word to come true. For example in Gen. 8:1: **THEN GOD REMEMBERED NOAH, AND EVERY LIVING THING, AND ALL THE ANIMALS THAT WERE WITH HIM IN THE ARK. AND GOD MADE A WIND TO PASS OVER THE EARTH, AND THE WATERS SUBSIDED.** Gen. 19:29: **AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN GOD DESTROYED THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN, THAT GOD REMEMBERED ABRAHAM, AND SENT LOT OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE OVERTHROW, WHEN HE OVERTHREW THE CITIES IN WHICH LOT HAD DWELT.** Gen. 30:22: **THEN GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL, AND GOD LISTENED TO HER AND OPENED HER WOMB.**

When God remembers, He does something about it. God remembers and acts graciously toward us. When God causes us to remember something, He also causes us to do something. He causes us to believe. He causes us to receive, by faith, His gracious gifts. By the time this Lenten season is over we pray that the power of God's Word will cause us to remember the way God remembers, with loving action.

In the Bible text for tonight, the psalmist writes, God **KNOWS OUR FRAME; HE REMEMBERS THAT WE ARE DUST.** We hear these words at the cemetery when the person is being buried---we are dust and ashes. But we don't always remember that we are dust. So we can't or don't do anything about it. But God remembers and does something about it. Again our text says, **AS A FATHER PITIES HIS CHILDREN, SO THE LORD PITIES THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.**

GOD REMEMBERS THAT PEOPLE ARE DUST SO THAT HE SHOWS COMPASSION.

I. GOD "KNOWS OUR FRAME."

God knows exactly how we are made because God made us. God crafted human life by hand. Everything else was created by God saying, "**LET THERE BE**" and the power of His Word brought the thing He said into existence. But the crown of God's creation—the creation of human life—was different. We read in Gen 2:7, **AND THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN OF THE DUST OF THE GROUND, AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE; AND MAN BECAME A LIVING BEING.**

At the end of that day, God **SAW EVERYTHING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND INDEED IT WAS VERY GOOD.** Being made from dust wasn't a bad thing. It was "**VERY GOOD.**" But then sin came and everything changed. Sin ruined everything. But even from that ruined condition the LORD urges us to praise Him because we are "**FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE.**" We are dust that God has created and priced at a high value. Sometimes God's people forgot that their value came from God, from His creating hand, from His wonderful design. They tried to live without God, separate from Him. They even turned to

other “gods,” idols they formed with their own hands. They’d come a long way, from being handmade by their God to making their gods by hand. They thought they were powerful! They could not, however, escape the fact that they were dust, because even that wonderfully made dust would go back to dust. Gen 3:19 says: **FOR DUST YOU ARE, AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN.**

But even in death,

**GOD REMEMBERS THAT PEOPLE ARE DUST
SO THAT HE SHOWS COMPASSION.**

II. WHAT ABOUT US?

Do we tend to forget that we are dust? Do we remember how **“FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY”** God made us? Do we praise Him for it? Or do we think that we are wonderful on our own, without God? We find it offensive when we’re told that over millions of years we evolved from some lower form of animal. And that is offensive because it’s not true. The truth, however, is not very flattering either. You came from dust . . . even more common and lower than the evolutionists would put you! Do we really believe that we are dust and ashes? Or do we think the word of God in Gal 6:3 applies only to someone else? **FOR IF ANYONE THINKS HIMSELF TO BE SOMETHING, WHEN HE IS NOTHING, HE DECEIVES HIMSELF.**

We can deceive ourselves for a long time, but at some point, this dust will return to dust, and your dust will return to dust. But even in death, and perhaps especially at that time of greatest need, when even the strongest person can do nothing at all:

**GOD REMEMBERS THAT PEOPLE ARE DUST
SO THAT HE SHOWS COMPASSION.**

III. GOD REMEMBERED THAT PEOPLE WERE DUST.

But they were His dust, His people, His children. So God dealt with His people with compassion, as a father deals with His child. God remembers that His people are dust and very fragile dust at that. How quickly our life can end---disease, illness, accident! So first, God moved His people to realize their nature—that they were dust and helpless apart from Him. Listen to how God led Abraham to pray: **INDEED NOW, I WHO AM BUT DUST AND ASHES HAVE TAKEN IT UPON MYSELF TO SPEAK TO THE LORD.** (Gen 18:27).

When Israel strayed from the LORD and were defeated in battle, we are told **THEN JOSHUA TORE HIS CLOTHES, AND FELL TO THE EARTH ON HIS FACE BEFORE THE ARK OF THE LORD UNTIL EVENING, HE AND THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL; AND THEY PUT DUST ON THEIR HEADS.** (Josh 7:6).

When Job had all his troubles, his friends saw him and could not even recognize him because of his boils and **THEY LIFTED THEIR VOICES AND WEPT; AND EACH ONE TORE HIS ROBE AND SPRINKLED DUST ON HIS HEAD TOWARD HEAVEN.** (Job 2:12).

When trouble comes, God remembers that people are dust, and He has ways to make His people remember that too. When God caused the people to remember that they were dust, He caused them to do something. God caused them to repent. When God remembered, He also did something. He had compassion. God forgave His people who looked to Him . . . who repented in dust and ashes. Ps 113:7 says, **HE RAISES THE POOR OUT OF THE DUST, AND LIFTS THE NEEDY OUT OF THE ASH HEAP.**

We see God’s compassion best in Jesus. In Mt 9:36 we read, **BUT WHEN HE SAW THE MULTITUDES, HE WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION FOR THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE WEARY AND SCATTERED, LIKE SHEEP HAVING NO SHEPHERD.** In Mt 14:14 we are told, **AND WHEN JESUS WENT OUT HE SAW A GREAT MULTITUDE; AND HE WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION FOR THEM, AND HEALED THEIR SICK.** Jesus remembered that people were dust, felt sorry for them because of their need, and did something about that need. His compassion even took Him all the way to the cross, to death and damnation for us.

**GOD REMEMBERS THAT PEOPLE ARE DUST
SO THAT HE SHOWS COMPASSION.**

IV. GOD ALSO HAS WAYS OF WORKING IN OUR LIVES TO CAUSE US TO REMEMBER THAT WE ARE DUST.

When times of trouble and great need come, God uses that trouble and need to turn us around so that we think and pray like Abraham, **INDEED NOW, I WHO *AM BUT DUST AND ASHES* HAVE TAKEN IT UPON MYSELF TO SPEAK TO THE LORD.** (Gen 18:27). Then we ask God to be gracious toward us and have compassion on us, because even though we are sinful, we are still the wonderful and valuable crown of God's creation! God remembers that we are dust, but He handles His dust very carefully! He handles us gently, with compassion. In one way, we are still dust creatures like Adam, but in another way, we are heavenly creatures like Jesus.

St. Paul makes this connection in 1 Cor. 15:47–48: **THE FIRST MAN WAS OF THE EARTH, *MADE OF DUST*; THE SECOND MAN *IS* THE LORD FROM HEAVEN. AS *WAS* THE *MAN OF DUST*, SO ALSO *ARE* THOSE *WHO ARE MADE OF DUST*; AND AS *IS* THE *HEAVENLY MAN*, SO ALSO *ARE* THOSE *WHO ARE HEAVENLY*.** God remembers that we are dust, but God sees us through Jesus, and that makes us very special dust...heavenly dust. Not on our own, but in Christ, we are a new creation. God compassionately and gently arranges us so that we **“ARE OF HEAVEN”** even while we are here on earth.

We are dust. But we are God's dust. It's also true that money can't buy life. But the precious blood of Christ has bought us eternal life! Tonight we look at ourselves and see dust and ashes. But God's Word leads us to repent and receive forgiveness. What a change takes place! In Christ, the Scripture is fulfilled, as Isaiah tells us, **TO PROVIDE FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE IN ZION-- TO BESTOW ON THEM A CROWN OF BEAUTY INSTEAD OF ASHES.** (Is 61:3).

Amen.